

**Learning to listen, listening to learn. An investigation into listening practices in classrooms.**

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**I certify that this thesis has been written by me and is my own work.**

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## Abstract

There is a large body of research which has examined the cognitive processes associated with listening, much of it based on experiments rather than on naturalistic observations. This research has examined the cognitive and affective processing of verbal and non-verbal messages; the role of long-term and short-term memory; and the significance of cognitive schema in receiving, attending to and interpreting messages. While such studies have given us a much richer understanding of the nature of listening, their focus on individual cognitive processes has meant that important features of listening in classroom contexts have received little attention. This thesis moves away from a narrow focus on the development of skills of individual learners and examines listening from a sociocultural perspective as a set of classroom practices. Attention is drawn to the nature and demands of listening and the ways they impact on classroom activities; how listeners adjust purpose and activity depending on the requirements of different genres of texts; and the ways in which listeners monitor and control their listening actions within classrooms. Within the study listening is conceptualised in relation to the wider movements in literacy development.

This thesis reports on a series of focused interviews with teachers and secondary school pupils aged between eleven and twelve years in which the everyday demands of listening within classrooms were investigated. The interview study formed part of a wider project which comprised three further parts: observation of the ongoing work of ten target classes (drawn from schools situated in differing socio-economic areas in and around Edinburgh); more focused observation of lessons explicitly designed to enhance the listening capacities of pupils; and analysis of the written plans for, and audio taped recordings of, these lessons. A key consideration was the wish to observe good practice. Consequently, the teachers whose classes were observed and who were interviewed were chosen on the basis of their reputation as skilled practitioners.

Consideration is given to the ways in which teachers scaffolded and supported pupils' listening activity, and it is argued that current representations of scaffolding need to be expanded to take account of the findings of the present study. In addition, the picture which emerged points to the need to acknowledge the way in which control over listening is dependent on acquiring specific knowledge that enables pupils to frame their attention within the demands of different listening tasks and genres of texts. As a result of this it is suggested that established accounts of metacognitive control and monitoring may need to be developed to take account of how 'executive control' entails the internalisation of specific norms governing the ideational and interpersonal uses of language within classrooms.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### Background

Listening is important for a number of reasons, though four main areas for consideration emerge. The first concerns the nature of language development and the widely held view that of the four main language skills (reading, writing, talking and listening) listening is the most basic – and it is also the first skill that we develop. Thus, our ability to speak, read, write and master complex cognitive skills is directly and indirectly dependent upon our ability to listen. The second reason is that throughout all levels of our educational development listening is the main channel of instruction. This can be readily seen from observations in Primary 1 classrooms to the three-hour lecture sessions which may take place at post-graduate level. Third, the importance of listening in learning and communicating is also apparent in our daily lives. Not only do we spend more time listening than in any other form of verbal communication, but as a result of modern technological advancements we engage in considerable interpersonal communication and mass communication. Finally, researchers have investigated the amount of time business personnel spend engaged in listening. Research reveals that most employees of major corporations in North America and company executives spend about 60%<sup>1</sup> and 63%<sup>2</sup> respectively of their working day engaged in listening. Studies investigating the frequency of the function of listening, in and out of the classroom, conclude that listening consumes more of our daily communication time than does any other form of verbal communication. Hence, quantitatively, the most important form of verbal communication is listening, a skill which research suggests does not automatically improve with use.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Brown. *Communicating Facts and Ideas in Business* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982:380)

<sup>2</sup> W.F. Keefe. *Listen, Management!* (NY: McGraw-Hill 1971:10)

Although listening is the most important language skill it is also the most neglected at all educational levels (Hoag & Wood, 1990). Hoag and Wood, reporting on an extensive study of 99 teacher-training colleges and universities, found that very few student and lecturer respondents could remember receiving direct, focused, structured listening training at school. Frequently the only instruction they received was requests and commands to pay attention and/or a few lists of listening 'dos' and 'don'ts'. Listening pedagogy and practices received the least curricular time in the Language Departments of the teacher-training institutions compared to reading, writing and talking. Indeed, talking and listening together were accorded appreciably less curricular time than reading and writing. They conclude:

Listening researchers and supportive evidence contends our language educational system is upside down and is contrary to communication practices and needs. The skills needed most (listening) in life are taught the least, while the skills used the least (reading) are taught the most ... Children who know how to listen will become more literate because they will be capable of applying those life-skills most demanded of them ... to listen. Language lecturers are in a pivotal position in determining what pre-service teachers ultimately teach in the classroom. The call here is to teach teachers how to teach listening. Those teachers will teach children how to listen.

(Hoag & Wood, 1990:12)

In light of these – and similar findings, a central concern of the current study, therefore, was to investigate how, and how well, listening was being taught in Scottish secondary schools.

### **Listening in classrooms: a neglected area of research**

This thesis presents an analysis of listening practices in classrooms based on a series of interviews undertaken with teachers of English and pupils at the lower stages (i. e. first year and second year, S1 and S2) in Scottish secondary schools,

an area which has been neglected in previous research. The decision to investigate this topic was driven by two main areas of personal interest. The first of these was an awareness that previous research into listening, conducted mainly by cognitive psychologists, has had a limited focus on individual cognitive processing whereas the sociocultural contexts within which listening occurred have been given little attention. In contrast, however, recent research into language and literacy development (and in several other related disciplines) has shifted attention away from the individual and focused more on the social and cultural environment. The second area of personal interest arose from a particular interest in listening within the classroom setting; in the demands of curricular documents and arrangements with regard to the teaching and assessment of listening; and in the pedagogical practices employed by teachers to meet these demands.

Previous research into listening has focused on the individual listener's cognitive and affective processing of verbal and non-verbal messages, the role of long-term and short-term memory and the significance of cognitive schema in receiving, attending to and interpreting messages. These studies have given us a much richer understanding of the nature of listening. Their focus on the cognitive processes employed by individual listeners, however, has meant that important features of listening in the social and cultural contexts of classrooms have received little attention. For example, the question of how teachers and pupils, (as opposed to cognitive psychologists), construe the nature and demands of listening and the ways in which these conceptions may impact on classroom activities have not been explored in any depth. There is also a dearth of observational work concerned with detailing the listening practices that children engage in within classrooms. The current study has attempted to address this gap in knowledge by examining how teachers and secondary school pupils conceptualise listening. The study has also been centrally concerned with delineating the nature of the 'listening work' that was required of pupils by observing lessons.



Research into literacy development over the past two decades has resulted in several significant shifts towards broader definitions which move it away from the individual and situate it firmly within society. The central importance of oracy in the development of literacy has been recognised, and current definitions take account of listening and talking. The close relationship between literacy, language, learning, communication, classroom interaction and pedagogy has also been investigated extensively, and there has been a considerable expansion of the literature in each of these areas. The research reported on in this thesis was informed by these broader perspectives. Reading and writing have received significant attention from researchers, and there is convincing evidence that this has resulted in increased practitioner understanding and improved pedagogical practices. Similarly, pupil interaction in peer groups within classrooms has been explored and much is now known about the nature and quality of pupil talk. Listening, however, has not received the same attention.

The place of oral communication in general, and of listening in particular, in Scottish classrooms, has been, and continues to be, under threat although attempts have been made in successive government curricular documents to give them increased prominence. Curricular developments, however, did not take place in a careful, systematic manner beginning with the early stages in primary schools and progressing to the upper stages in secondary schools. Rather, they occurred in what would appear to be a haphazard way, with little or no account taken of progression from one course to the next, or of articulation between courses. It is also clear from the published curricular guidelines and arrangements, within which listening is conceptualised fairly narrowly, that there exists some confusion concerning the nature and processes of listening. The present study, therefore, was also prompted by very real concerns about the place of listening within the Scottish curriculum, concerns which have intensified over the period of the research for, and the writing of, this thesis.



In light of this personal interest in, and concern about, the place of listening outlined in the preceding paragraphs, it seemed appropriate to investigate listening practices within secondary school classrooms. A brief outline of the ways in which these interests and concerns were explored is offered below.

### **The wider study**

The interviews reported on in this thesis are part of a wider study undertaken by the author into listening practices within classrooms. The study comprised four methods of investigation:

- observation of the ongoing work of 10 target classes of 11 or 12 year old pupils;
- more focused observation of lessons that were explicitly designed by the teachers of these classes to enhance the listening capacities of the pupils;
- focused interviews with the 10 teachers whose classes were observed;
- focused interviews with 40 pupils, 4 drawn from each of the 10 classes.

Three S1 classes and seven S2 classes were observed. Observations of the ongoing work of the S1 classes, and of the actual teaching sessions, took place during the second and third term of the 1999-2000 academic session; the observations of the S2 classes took place in the first term of the 2000-2001 academic session. All interviews, both teacher and pupil, were organised as soon as possible after the teaching sessions had been completed.<sup>3</sup> This was important for a number of reasons. It was essential that the lessons remained fresh in the minds of both teacher and pupil participants, since part of the interview invited respondents to reflect on these lessons. Because of this it was also important for the researcher to be able to recall exactly what had happened

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<sup>3</sup> One teacher interview took place immediately following her final teaching session. The other nine occurred between three days and eight days after the teaching had been completed. 25% of the pupil interviews took place on the same day of the last teaching session. The rest occurred within six days.

within each lesson. Although the listening lessons were all tape-recorded, and detailed running records were kept, an important concern was to maintain a sense of the 'feel' of each teaching session.

The desire to observe 'good practice' was an overriding factor when making decisions about sampling, and ten teachers with a reputation for being 'skilled' practitioners were therefore selected. Further, an important decision in relation to pupil sampling was to make use of the teachers' knowledge of the pupils, and therefore to ask him or her to identify, in advance, two 'good' listeners and two 'less successful' listeners. These sampling methods will be justified in Chapter 4 in which methodological issues and concerns are discussed.

It has already been noted that it is not the purpose of this thesis to report on each part of the wider study. Rather, an analysis of, and report on, the teacher and pupil interviews will be presented and the observational studies will only be drawn upon to illuminate points of interest and to demonstrate the ways in which they informed the interviews and contributed to their interpretation. A brief summary of the observations will therefore be offered in Chapter 4 to contextualise teachers' and pupils' reports on the lessons taught and to provide the reader with some insight into the purpose, nature and outcomes of the observations. Analysis of the interviews with teachers and pupils, which reveals how they construe and conceptualise listening practices within their classrooms, will therefore be the main focus of this thesis.

## **Structure of the thesis**

Following on from this brief introduction, the review of relevant literature is presented in two separate chapters. The first of these chapters provides an historical context for the present study, drawing on developments within such fields as psychology, communication, education, language, literacy and

sociocultural research. Listening from the perspective of cognitive psychology is discussed. The following chapter builds on this historical context by widening the focus to include an account of more recent shifts towards broader definitions of literacy, and considering parallel developments within genre theory, literary theory, metacognition and pedagogical practices. The aim, therefore, is to bring together a significant body of research from different disciplines and thereby provide a broad theoretical background against which the work of the present study on listening, viewed from a sociocultural perspective, is situated.

Chapter 2, therefore, situates the present study within previous work. Different definitions and models of the listening process, devised by listening theorists, are offered, and a detailed account is given of previous research into listening in which the focus was mainly on the individual cognitive processes involved. Such processes include attention, memory and understanding. A brief historical account of the place of oral communication in the curriculum is then given and our increasing understanding of its crucial importance for learning is discussed. The focus then shifts to learning from a sociocultural perspective and the relationship between language and learning is considered. Finally, the transactional model of communication, which recognises its dynamic nature, is outlined.

Chapter 3 begins with an account of the move towards wider definitions of literacy and discusses the implications of this shift for listening. Following on from this, the perspectives of the genre theorists are considered, their different stances outlined, and the impact of such theories on reading and writing is discussed. Parallel developments in literary theory are then explored within what have been termed 'reader response theories' and the implications of such theories for viewing listening within a wider sociocultural context are examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research into metacognition and the implications of such research for learning and teaching. An outline of recent

developments in pedagogical practices as a result of these significant shifts towards sociocultural perspectives on learning is then offered.

In Chapter 4 an account is given of methodological decisions and procedures and a rationale for the methods chosen is provided. Issues of validity, reliability and ethical procedures are discussed and the approach adopted for observations and interviews with pupil and teacher participants is justified. A full discussion of the difficulties associated with interviewing children is presented. An account is then given of the ways in which the data were analysed and of decisions made with regard to the reporting of the findings.

Chapter 5 analyses the teachers' accounts of the listening practices within their classrooms. Drawing on the observational studies, as appropriate, their perceptions as presented in the interviews of the demands of listening tasks, texts, contexts, and purposes and how they impact on listening practices are explored, and the discourses upon which they draw to respond to questions are highlighted. Their own roles and responsibilities in ensuring that pupils are offered a range and variety of appropriate contexts within which they can develop their skills in listening, and the ways in which they support and 'scaffold' pupil listening, are examined. Their accounts reveal the extent to which these teachers have moved significantly beyond current representations of scaffolding. Consequently, the need to expand on such representations emerges as a central finding of this thesis. Similarly, both the observational studies and the interviews with teachers highlight the need to 'problematise' the concept of metacognition and the idea of conscious control and monitoring of listening, since established accounts do not reflect the pedagogical practices in these classrooms nor the social and cultural contexts within which learning and teaching occur.

Chapter 6 looks at listening from the point of view of the forty pupils who participated in this study, and at their perceptions of themselves as listeners.

Where appropriate, comparisons between, and contrasts with, the pupils' accounts and those offered by their teachers are reported on. As is the case in the previous Chapter, the observational studies are drawn upon when considering pupils' reports of particular teaching episodes, in order to ensure that as accurate and full a picture as possible is provided. Their perceptions of the demands of listening texts, tasks, contexts and purposes are explored, as is their awareness of the ways in which their teachers scaffolded their listening. In addition, an account is offered of how the pupils perceive themselves to be scaffolding each others' listening within group interactions and of the metacognitive strategies they adopt during small group discussions and individual listening tasks. Their accounts of their rights and responsibilities within small group discussions are discussed. Analysis of the teachers' interviews, reported on in Chapter 5, highlighted both the need to expand on how scaffolding is presently represented in the literature and to reconceptualise the concept of metacognition. The findings from Chapter 6 support this conclusion.

In the discussion in Chapter 7, the central themes identified in the teachers' interviews and the pupils' interviews are considered, and the new insights into, and perspectives on, the listening practices within the social and cultural contexts of classrooms which emerged from this thesis are highlighted. It is argued that in light of the findings of the present study there is a need to move away from the narrow focus on listening as individual cognitive processing which has characterised much of the previous research, towards viewing it from a sociocultural perspective. From such a perspective, account must be taken of the context within which listening occurs (both social and educational), of the genre of the text, of the purposes for listening and of the prior knowledge and understanding that the listener brings to the task.

The limitations of how scaffolding has previously been construed are discussed and, drawing on the findings of this study, suggestions are made about how

such accounts could be expanded to reflect what was actually happening in these classrooms. Finally, drawing mainly, though not exclusively, on the findings from the pupils' interviews and on the observational work, it is argued that there are convincing arguments for the need to problematise and reconceptualise the concept of metacognition. Current accounts do not reflect the range of metacognitive strategies that the pupils used during the lessons observed; nor do they encompass the approaches reported on during the pupil interviews. The chapter concludes by considering the implications for teaching and learning practices within classrooms with regard to listening which emerge from the findings of the study, and highlights areas of government policy-making in respect of listening and language learning which require attention.

Moving now to Chapter 2, the first of the two chapters in which the literature is reviewed, an account will be offered of the historical context which forms the background for the present study.



### Introduction

In recent studies in psychology and education there has been a move from research into the cognitive processes involved in literacy, which was very much concerned with the cognitive processes of individuals, towards researching literacy within wider sociocultural perspectives. Parallel research by communication theorists has resulted in a shift from narrow definitions of what is involved in communication towards models which recognise the important role of the listener within complex transactions. Similarly, narrow definitions of literacy, which defined it simply as the ability to read and write, have been challenged by researchers who have offered wider definitions which include listening, talking and critical thinking. To situate the present study firmly within the context of previous and current research, and thus allow clarity of exposition, the review of the literature will be presented in two separate chapters, i.e. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

The purpose of the present chapter is to place the present thesis within the historical context of previous work. The chapter is divided into four separate parts. In part one the research of cognitive psychologists, which has focused mainly on the individual cognitive processes involved in listening, will be discussed and a number of different definitions and models of the listening process will be outlined. Such processes include attention, memory and understanding. Although the aim of the present study was to research listening in classrooms within a sociocultural framework, this was not to deny the importance of understanding the individual cognitive processes involved; indeed, many of the teacher and pupil respondents made use of such understandings, both implicit and explicit, in their accounts. In part two a brief historical account will be offered of the place of oral communication in the

curriculum and our increasing understanding of its crucial importance for learning will be discussed. In part three the focus will shift to current theories of learning, which view it from a sociocultural perspective, and will explore the relationship between oral language and learning. Part four will outline the transactional model of communication, which recognises its dynamic nature.

### **The process of listening**

As human communicators, listeners interact with speakers. Since listening is an integral part of human communication, many listening researchers believe that it is best to study listening behaviour within the *process* of communication. They have come to recognise the process nature of human communication, viewing it as an ongoing, dynamic interaction of components. Communication, as a process, is thus iterative, in that one message may well influence another and serve as the stimulus for the continuation of the communication. Several writers have provided an overview of the process of communication through the identification of components and variables that make up a complex human behaviour which enables individuals to link with and relate to each other. Within this context, listening is viewed as a critical determinant of the process and its results. This contextual view of listening as communication should shape our understanding of how listeners function as communicators in the transaction (Rhodes, 1993).

Basic to any attempt to define listening is the following question: is listening a distinct behaviour that is separate from other intellectual behaviours? Several factor analytic studies have provided evidence that listening is, indeed, a distinct activity. However, the factor analysis that has given decisive support to the theory that there is a separate listening factor was performed by Spearritt in 1962 in Australia. Spearritt tested more than four hundred sixth graders in ten schools in Melbourne. He used 34 different tests to measure reasoning, verbal



comprehension, attention, auditory resistance, memory and listening comprehension. The factor analysis of the results of all these tests isolated a 'disparate' listening component factor, distinct from the students' performance in reasoning, verbal comprehension, attention, auditory resistance and memory. Spearritt concluded that:

Listening is a kind of human behaviour in itself, separate from reading, from memory, and from other intellectual behaviours, although dependent on them as they are probably dependent on it.

(Spearritt, 1962:14)

Throughout the years, researchers have produced numerous definitions of the listening process, each attempting to capture the essence of what it means to listen. The lists compiled by Wolvin and Coakley (1993) and by Glenn (1989) provided striking examples of the wide range of listening definitions. When Glenn analysed fifty of these definitions, she determined that similarities and differences among the various approaches depended largely on the presence or absence of seven independent dimensions – attention, memory, perception, interpretation, response, spoken sounds and visual cues. The component of interpretation was present most frequently, occurring in 72% of the definitions. The next most common dimensions were perception (64%) and attention (44%). Response – with no distinction made between overt and covert response – occurred in 32% of definitions and memory in 13%. When Barker and Fitch-Hauser reviewed the listening literature in 1986, they discovered almost 315 variables associated with listening.

One of the earliest definitions by Tucker (1925) conceptualised listening as 'an analysis of the impressions resulting from concentration where an effort of will is required.' Rankin (1926), who was among the first to focus on auditory listening, defined listening as 'the ability to understand spoken language.' Later researchers became more specific regarding the elements or processes involved in listening. For example, Lewis (1958) included four elements in his definition

of listening: 'the process of hearing, identifying, understanding and interpreting spoken language.' Similarly, more recent listening researchers have focused on auditory stimuli in their listening definitions. Floyd's (1985) conception of listening is illustrative: 'a process that includes hearing, attending to, understanding, evaluating and responding to spoken messages.' More recently, a group of researchers produced the following definition: 'listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages' (Wolvin and Coakley, 1996).

As listening researchers have grappled with a conceptual understanding of what is involved in the process of listening, it is apparent that differences and even confusion have arisen in attempts to define it. Too frequently, it was assumed to be synonymous with hearing, though this assumption is erroneous. Listening goes beyond hearing. This confusion may suggest that little progress has been made. However, researchers are steadily accumulating information about what is involved in listening. In their efforts to address some of the major concerns emerging from the literature – lack of a theoretical framework, lack of information-sharing across disciplinary boundaries, the covert nature of the listening process – researchers have created models that suggest the key dimensions of the listening process and how they fit together.

Developed by Steil, Barker and Watson (1983) the SIER model presented listening as a four-stage process involving the interconnected activities of sensing, interpreting, evaluating and responding. The authors emphasised that their model is a diagnostic tool as well as a means of better understanding of the listening process. Wolff and Marsnik (1992) viewed speaking and listening as distinct roles in the curricular, transactional process of oral-aural communication. Their model included one physical and five mental processes and suggested that listening be conceptualised in three sequential stages – hearing and attending, interpreting and recreating, and retaining and responding. The Wolvin and Coakley (1992) sequential model defined listening

as an interpersonal activity, the process of receiving, attending to and assigning meaning to aural and visual stimuli. Their model illustrated how sounds are processed mentally. Brownell (1996) offered the six-component behavioural model, known as the HURIER model, which was intended to serve as a framework for building listening skills. The letters in the acronym represented the six interrelated listening processes – hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating and responding.

### *Stimuli*

There is agreement among the proponents of the different paradigms that there are two general types of stimuli involved in the act of listening, aural and visual, and all stress the importance of visual stimuli. The importance of visual stimuli cannot be ignored when we consider Birdwhistell's (1992:29) claims that spoken words account for no more than 30-35% of meanings in social interactions and Mehrabian (1971:43-44) estimated that as much as 93% of the total meaning of a feeling message may stem from non-verbal cues. Reviewing the literature on listening and visual communication, Sewell (1989:28) concluded that:

The visual aspect of listening has been overlooked in the majority of our research, and it is time to include it in our thinking, our models, and our research on the listening process.

Sewells' conclusions concerning the neglect of visual stimuli within previous listening research, and the need to include such stimuli in future studies, is of particular interest to the present thesis. Despite Sewell's view that visual stimuli have not featured significantly in previous research, the teachers' pedagogical practices demonstrated clearly their awareness of the value of including both kinds of stimulus in their day-to-day teaching and particularly when teaching their listening lessons. In other words, *practice appeared to have preceded research*. The following paragraphs will therefore briefly foreshadow areas with regard to stimulus and listening pedagogy which will be discussed in considerably more detail in later Chapters of the thesis.

During the observational work (which is described in Chapter 4) it was significant to note that each of the ten teachers observed had planned lessons which included teaching resources containing *both aural and visual stimuli*. Aural stimulus materials included tape recordings of extracts from plays, dramatic monologues, poetry, narratives, different kinds of informational texts and music. Pupils also listened to their teacher reading aloud, or to other members of the class reading parts from plays or extracts from longer fictional or non-fiction texts. Visual resources included video tape recordings of plays; storytellers; informational texts such as news reports; historical information texts; genre transformations from novels to media texts; documentaries; and extracts from films. Pupils frequently worked in small groups and therefore had both aural and visual information to process as they listened to the oral contributions of group members and gathered information from their non-verbal communication. These classroom observations prompted questions for respondents concerning the cognitive demands of simultaneously listening and watching and whether, and in what circumstances, dealing with concurrent stimuli facilitated or hindered effective listening.

Furthermore, the sections in the following chapter of the literature review (Chapter 3) which discuss genre theory and reader response theories highlight the crucial importance of familiarity with the different structures and linguistic features of the genres of texts and the ways in which such familiarity determines subsequent reading behaviours. Previous literature has demonstrated that readers quickly make both conscious and unconscious decisions about the genre of a text, and will therefore have certain expectations about what they will subsequently read. On some occasions these expectations will be confirmed; on others readers will need to make adjustments to their expectations and to their ensuing reading behaviours. What is clear is that either of these reading situations would inevitably result in a considerable amount of cognitive activity, whether the reader was confirming his or her first impressions or, having

recognised that the initial assignation of the text to a particular genre had been incorrect, making adjustments to reading behaviour. These central themes will be taken forward in the present study with regard to listening and listening behaviours. By referring to the specific teaching episodes observed, it was possible to gather data on the ways in which teachers and pupils believed they consciously monitored their understanding and what measures they adopted when understanding faltered or broke down. In other words, in the second sense of Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* that is concerned with conscious awareness and volition (which is discussed later in the chapter) what cognitive and metacognitive strategies did they adopt?

Turning once again to the process of listening, the importance of attention to the listener for sustaining his or her focus on a stimulus – whether aural or visual – will be explored.

### ***Attention***

There is agreement about the importance of attention – the focused perception on selected stimuli – and its elusive nature which many consider to be the major trap that listeners encounter in their efforts to focus on stimuli. However, what is clear from the literature is that this remains a problematic area. The following section will summarise the main areas of research undertaken by cognitive psychologists, and will conclude by indicating features of attention highlighted within the present study which have not previously been brought into view.

Although there is no limit to the number of stimuli constantly competing for our attention, there are a limited number of stimuli to which we can attend at any one time. Thus, we must constantly engage in a process of selecting only those stimuli to which we will attend. It is believed that some discriminatory mechanism assists us in selecting the wanted from the unwanted aural stimuli

(for a detailed account of different models of attention, see Parasuraman and Davies, 1984).

Beginning with the first formal attention model proposed by Broadbent in 1958, many explanations of how this discriminatory process operates have been proposed. Like Broadbent's model, other early attention models (such as those developed by Deutsch and Deutsch (1968), by Treisman (1960) and by Neisser (1967)) viewed information processing as a series of steps, with selecting attention operating at a particular stage. An attention model, proposed by Kahneman (1973) (which is explained more fully on pages 19-20) also recognised the limited capacity of attention energy. However, the model treated attention as a resource that can be flexibly allocated, or distributed, to different stages – rather than one stage – of information processing.

According to Broadbent's 1958 model of attention, aural stimuli enter the nervous system through a number of sensory input channels. Broadbent posited that the various input lines converge onto a sensory filter that functions as a selective mechanism. The filter selects stimuli, not on the basis of analysis of meaning but rather on the basis of analysis of certain physical features towards which it is biased. It then allows the selected stimuli to penetrate consciousness through a limited capacity channel. Unselected stimuli are held in a short-term store for a brief time, after which they are attended to or lost.

Deutsch and Deutsch (1968) found Broadbent's theory to be attractive when applied to simple and few discriminations. They questioned its application, however, to cases where numerous and complex applications are required and proposed a different model:

Another mechanism is proposed, which assumes the existence of a shifting reference standard, which takes up the level of the most important arriving signal .... Only the most important signals will be acted on or remembered. On the other hand, more important signals than those present at an immediately



preceding time will be able to break in, for these will raise the height of the level and so displace the previously most important signals as the highest.

(Deutsch and Deutsch, 1968:80)

The third model of attention was proposed by Triesman (1960). She posited that messages, having arrived at some part of the nervous system over different input channels, are first analysed for physical characteristics such as pitch, loudness and location in space. A filter uses the information obtained by this analysis to identify the messages that will be selected for attention. On other occasions, the filter bases its selection on more complex discrimination, such as the analysis of syllable patterns, grammatical structure or meaning. Triesman further postulated that the selective filter's tuning flexibility, determined by the perceived meanings in an individual's state of awareness, allows the filter to alternate incoming information (i.e. make the information more or less perceptible rather than completely block it out).

In 1967, Neisser proposed the two-process theory of analysis by synthesis. He postulated that incoming stimuli go through preattentive processing. During this processing, stored knowledge is actively used to analyse the stimulus' sensory and semantic features for important information. Viewing such focused attention as a result of all processing, Neisser theorised that attended and unattended stimuli differ only in the amount of processing given to them. Discounting the prevailing view that some incoming stimuli are never attended to because they have been blocked out or attenuated, Neisser theorised that they are not attended to because they have not been processed as fully as attended stimuli have been.

Kahneman (1973) proposed a capacity model that views attention as a limited-capacity resource that can be flexibly allocated to various stages of information processing. The way we distribute our attentional energy is governed by automatic, unconscious rules; conscious decisions; and the difficulty of the mental task. According to Kahneman, an individual can change his or her

attentional distribution from moment to moment in order to meet the varying attentional requirements of conscious mental tasks (which demand considerable attentional energy) and automatic mental tasks (which demand little attentional energy, and so do not interfere with other ongoing information-processing tasks).

An interesting variation of Kahneman's understanding of attention as the allocation of resources is Wickens' (1980) multiple resource theory of attention which suggests that an individual may use attentional resources that are specific to a particular modality or to a particular processing task. Attention results from activating a sensory modality (auditory or visual) through the allocation of the attention resources that the person has available. Since our attention resources are limited by such factors as time and energy, interference to attention is a major challenge for listeners.

The dominant view of attention presently follows Kahneman's capacity theory which emphasises the flexible nature of attention although disagreements continue as to how selective attention operates, where discriminatory decisions are made, and what happens to unselected stimuli. There is, however, experimental evidence that attention is selective (McCroskey, 1971). As listeners, we base our selection of aural stimuli upon a priority system that exists within each of us, a priority system which may stem from:

The tendency for people to pay close attention to information that is consistent with their attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours and pay little attention to stimuli which are inconsistent.

This need for consistency led McCroskey to conclude that:

Selective attention is not so much the conscious 'tuning out' of inconsistent information as it is the unconscious 'tuning in' to consistent information.

(McCroskey, 1971:172)



This process of tuning in and tuning out on messages has important implications for our understanding of listening behaviour.

Furthermore, attention is not only selective but is also energetic. It requires both effort and desire. Although we can divide our attention, we can give complete attention to only one stimulus at a time. If we expend too much energy on too many stimuli, we will no longer be attending; instead we will be scanning. Thus, by concentrating our attention energy on one stimulus instead of on many, we can focus more sharply on the selected stimulus. Once we have selected a stimulus to which we will attend, it has our attention; and, generally, only stimuli that have been attended to enter the listener's memory system (Collins et al, 1993).

Just as attention is selective and energetic, so too is it fluctuating. The waning of attention is particularly relevant to our understanding of the act of listening. We cannot pay attention to the selected stimulus for as long as we desire; attention fluctuates because of distractions and lapses. At other times this is the result of short attention span or lack of effort. The fluctuation of attention relates directly to the degree of effort that an individual has the capacity to exert at any given time in processing information.

It is clear, then, that listening efficiency is profoundly affected by the attention process. Limits to the attention span, a lack of motivation to concentrate, or an inadequate priority system for selecting stimuli all enter into the process. The fluctuating, selective, energetic nature of attention affects a listener's performance at any given point in the communication process.

While the research reported on in the preceding account is helpful in identifying the main cognitive processes involved in establishing and sustaining attention, the findings from the present study highlight the need to move towards a wider

representation of attention which focuses not only on the individual's ability to remain attentive, but on the sociocultural contexts within which the listening occurs. In Chapter 3 an account will be offered of the way in which the wider sociocultural perspectives adopted within research in related areas (e.g. literary theory, genre theories) have provided a richer and fuller picture, not only of the cognitions involved, but of the influence and impact of the social and cultural contexts within which such cognitions occurred.

### *The memory system*

Attended-to stimuli enter the long-term memory system (LTM). While a multistore view of human memory prevailed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, no prevailing view of the structure of the human memory presently exists. However, many notions incorporated in the multistore models are still accepted today; indeed, the multistore view is an important forerunner of current trends in memory research. Adherents to the multistore view posit that the human memory consists of two – or three if the sensory register is included – functionally separate and distinct structural components or stores: sensory register, short-term memory (STM) and long-term memory (LTM).

The sensory memory is the least permanent memory store; it is here that the stimuli in their raw form enter the memory system through various senses. The STM store, or the working memory, where conscious mental processes are performed on information from both the sensory register and the long-term store, is also a temporary store. The selected incoming stimulus is stored only briefly because of two notable limitations on the STM. One limitation is the length of time that a stimulus may be stored in it. Research indicates that if the stimulus in the STM is not attended to, it will decay within twenty seconds to one minute. However, the stimulus can be preserved for as long as we wish by engaging in the process of rehearsal. Rehearsal can be either simple or more elaborate. In addition, rehearsal appears to increase the chances of a stimulus reaching the cortex for attention and subsequently being committed to the long-

term memory system (for a detailed analysis see Collins et al, 1993; Bostram and Waldhart, 1988).

Despite its limitations, however, the STM is adequate in many listening situations, and Bostram and Waldhart postulate that the short-term retention of a stimulus may be more useful in some interactions than long-term retention, particularly in communication situations in which the relationships of the communicators may be more important than the details of the interactions.

Unlike the STM, which consists of the current contents of a person's awareness, the LTM system is essentially a permanent storage system consisting of all that we have previously learned. A principal difference between the two memory systems is that the short term memory is considered to have a fixed capacity that is subject to overload and consequent loss of elements from it (its second limitation), whereas the long-term memory is, in effect, infinitely expandable.

There is now widespread acknowledgement among listening researchers of the importance of memory within the listening process. Bostram and Waldhart (1988) considered the functioning of both STM and LTM in listening and discussed the shift from an emphasis on a fixed structure (distinct and separate memory systems) to an emphasis on flexible processing (with individuals actively using their cognitive skills and stored knowledge to process information). This new focus has led some researchers to view the STM as an activated portion of the LTM, rather than a separate store. It is clear, however, that attention in the memory system is a matter of energy:

For the past 30 years memory research has taken on a structure versus process approach. The question has been: is memory performance due to the physiology of human memory and its inherent strengths and physical limitations, or does remembering depend on applying appropriate processes at encoding and retrieval?

(Bentley, 1993:80-81)

Bentley believed that the theory of trace decay as a cause of forgetting should be of particular interest to listening theorists because it indicates that time is a critical factor in preserving what has been listened to, and she concurs that appropriate processing must take place within a given time-period in order to retain the information. She also noted the importance of the concept of a limited capacity STM, since the amount of information being listened to would be a critical factor in determining what will be remembered. The role of LTM in STM tasks should be of interest as well since research suggests that much of what we are able to remember from a spoken message is dependent on what we already know about a topic.

Furthermore, the structure of memory is a significant issue for listening theorists to consider because listening ability and skill are intimately involved with the storage and retrieval of information, and a key factor in listening ability could lie in which type of memory is being accessed and how structure affects performance.

Memory researchers have looked at memory from other perspectives, such as type of information stored, the instructions given at the time of presentation and the type of test task. These other perspectives have produced different categories of memory, including the following suggested by Bentley (1993):

incidental learning	v intentional learning
semantic memory	v episodic memory
procedural memory	v declarative memory
data-driven processing	v conceptually driven processing
memory system	v habit system

It would seem reasonable to assume that all of these types of memory could be involved in a typical listening situation. It is also possible for listening situations to involve only implicit memory. While we might assume that in a typical listening situation we are more effective at recalling information when we have taken intentional steps to store the information, this topic deserves research attention – especially to explore what steps people can consciously take as they are listening to

improve recall of what they are hearing. Regardless of the relationship between episodic and semantic memory, most listening tasks would seem to involve both types of memory .... Additionally, the concept of data-driven versus conceptually driven processing is important to the field of listening.

(Bentley, 1993:79)

Roediger et al (1989) concluded that a memory theory encompassing memory systems and something like processing modes or procedures would probably be the correct one:

A theory specifying both structural bases and processing assumptions is needed .... but those presently on the scene emphasise either structure to the relative neglect of processing assumptions (the systems approach) or processing assumptions to the relative neglect of structure (our own approach).

(Roediger et al, 1989:36)

However, it could be argued that in addition to giving weight to structure and processing, attention also needs to be given to the cultural tools that serve to enable and define the nature of listening. To make the point more specifically, it is necessary to foreshadow some of the discussion which is presented in Chapter 3. In that Chapter an account is given in the section on genre theory of recent developments into the teaching of reading which calls for pupils to be made aware of the structures of texts encountered in classrooms and of their distinctive linguistic and stylistic features. An awareness of the different genres of texts when reading, it is argued, will support pupils. It is further argued that such insights will be helpful as pupils attempt to replicate these forms and structures in their own writing. Pupils in English classrooms *will remember* that stories have fairly *predictable structural patterns*: exposition/introduction, complication, resolution, dénouement. There will be a storyline and the relationship between, and consequences of, the separate events of the story will develop the plot. *Literary and linguistic techniques* will be employed to characterise; to create a physical and temporal setting; to explore themes; and to establish and convey a particular tone, mood or atmosphere.



Such theories have important implications for listening and for memory. What the listener can cope with in the short term depends critically on how the message is structured and organised. It could be argued, however, that if listeners are already familiar with the structures of a wide range of texts within different disciplines, then much of the listening energy that goes into paying attention to how the texts are structured could, when the listener has satisfactorily confirmed the genre of the text, be redirected towards processing the content of the message. Further, the familiar structure of the text will then provide a means of organising the incoming information, thereby reducing the cognitive demands on the listener to organise and remember simultaneously. Such a model would encompass both 'structural bases' and 'processing assumptions' (Roediger et al, 1989).

The preceding paragraphs have demonstrated that while there is a certainly a great deal to be learned about listening by investigating individual memory processing, there remain, however, important aspects of memory that have previously been neglected. It was suggested in the previous section, in which listening and attention are discussed, that we need now to begin to consider the social and cultural contexts within which the listening is occurring, and the tools that can be made available by teachers to support pupils' listening. Similar conclusions can be reached with regard to memory. By considering the influence and impact of sociocultural contexts, and then re-examining individual processing theories and memory from a more informed stance, it is possible to envisage a theory of listening and memory which encompasses both individual and sociocultural perspectives.

### *Assigning meaning*

There is consensus among listening researchers that at some stage in the listening process meaning must be assigned to messages and various theories have been posited as to how this is done (Edwards and McDonald, 1993). Among these are image theory (Lundsteen, 1976), classical conditioning (Barker,

1978), linguistic reference, meaning as an implicit response, meaning as a mediating response, meaning as a behavioural disposition (Weaver, 1979) and more recently human information processing (Loftus and Schooler, 1987).

The information-processing model encouraged cognitive psychologists to develop another perspective to describe how information is stored and how humans handle the complex task of decoding/interpreting messages. A dominant perspective, schema theory (see Edwards and McDonald, 1993 for a review of schema theory and listening) is based on the concept that we all carry schemata – mental representations of knowledge – in our brains. These organised information structures consist of nodes (concepts, events, objects) and links (relationships of the nodes). New information is first run through existing schemata, or scripts, and then interpreted.

Schemata, therefore, represent the generic concepts that are stored in memory. These schemata relate persons or objects to attributes or relate actions to anticipated consequences. Schemata serve three listening purposes:

- they tell us what we should attend to;
- they serve as a framework for interpreting incoming information;
- they guide the reconstruction of memory.

Attitudes can also function as schemata in listeners. Schemata represent expectations that individuals have concerning the structure of the information to be encountered. Individuals who expect to encounter disagreeable or agreeable information, consistent with their own attitudes, process information according to their own expectations more readily than they processed either positive or negative information that did not conform to their prior expectations (Judd and Kulik, 1980). Judd and Kulik concluded that information that is either very disagreeable or agreeable, or that advocates an extreme position, appears to be easier for the listener to process and recall.

The schemata, or scripts, that individuals hold in their LTM store make up their cognitive structure. How these mental representations fit together, however, is a subject of much debate in the field of cognitive psychology. Listening researchers have discovered that individuals who are more cognitively complex have greater listening recall than less cognitively complex persons. Describing what they term the 'good information processor', Pressley, Borkowski and Schneider (1989) agreed that such individuals possess both extensive knowledge about important concepts and superior short-term memory capacities to plan strategically and monitor their thinking for maximum benefit.

Although there are differences between these theories of how individuals assign meaning to messages, it is apparent that the process is far from simple. As listeners, we assign a message to some sort of category or schema that we carry in our long-term memory, and making this assignment allows us to make some initial sense of the message. This requires a search of the categories or schemata to find a match in which the message fits. Once this interpretation is made, listeners are seen as moving to a more 'reflective processing' stage to 'think about the message, make more extensive inferences, evaluate and judge the speaker and the message etc.' (Pressley, Borkowski and Schneider, 1989:857).

Since the definition of meaning is to a very considerable degree dependent on individual experiences in the reflective processing stage, and since the process is so very complex, the possibility for assigning incorrect meanings to stimuli will lead to considerable errors in listening:

Learning how often and under what conditions you do this process well and others where you do it poorly can greatly aid you in learning to listen effectively.

(Halley, 1989:6)

Halley identified a number of causes of incorrect assignment of meaning. The major reason is that each person has a different schema or categorical system and that each develops meanings based on his or her own personal experiences.



Each communicator has his or her own frame of reference which consists of all the elements that make each person a unique individual. All of these elements that govern the way each individual views the world create the perceptual filter through which the listener screens each message. And not only do the listener's frame of reference and the perceptual filter alter the meaning of the speaker's words, but they also affect the listener's selection of information process. Furthermore the listener's frame of reference affects assignment of meaning when his or her emotional biases are aroused, as emotional triggers can arouse immediate, unthinking positive or negative reactions. Other common causes of inadequate meaning assignment are viewed as arising from the listener's limited knowledge, narrow experiences, inadequate vocabulary and rigidity in category or schema assignment.

### *Responding*

The inclusion or exclusion of overt responding from a definition of the listening process has generated a great deal of discussion and argument among listening researchers. Wolvin and Coakley (1996), as we have seen, have purposely excluded overt responding from their definition of listening, and suggest that:

It is important to determine whether covert or overt response is intended. If covert response is meant, the response could be part of:

- (1) the receiving process as our auditory and sensory mechanisms respond to the original stimulus;
- (2) the attention process, since the very act of attending to the stimulus is a response by the system;
- (3) the assignment of meaning process when we respond by categorising the stimulus through our schema so that it matches the intended meaning of the source.

(Wolvin and Coakley, 1996:96)

Wolvin and Coakley concluded, however, that if overt response is indicated, they do not consider responding to be part of the communication process, and argue that when listeners respond overtly they are no longer listeners; rather, they become the senders – that is, the coders of new messages – in the

communication process. Nevertheless, they fully acknowledge the primacy of overt responding in communication transactions. Their view concurs with Lundsteen's (1979:41) regarding where the process of listening actually ends: 'the term listening is appropriate when the person reaches the part in the series of steps where his experience brings meaning to verbal symbols.'

Rhodes (1993) identified two problems inherent in this position. The first is that by not recognising the response stage as part of listening, it is difficult to identify when listening takes place. Although most of what happens when people listen involves internal processing, Rhodes argued that a listener must respond for others to know how a message has been processed. The second problem he identified with the position adopted by Wolvin and Coakley (1996) and by Weaver (1972) is that it highlights a distinction between senders and receivers, a distinction which many communication theorists have tried to put to rest. As will be discussed, contemporary communication theory describes communication as a transactional process. From a transactional perspective, the use of terminology such as senders and receivers or speakers and listeners creates an artificial distinction. In any communication transaction each participant is simultaneously sending and receiving messages. To look at listening, then, from a transactional perspective, it is necessary to look at a 'listener' in relation to a 'speaker' – to look at both parties simultaneously – to look at both parties together as a whole.

Other theorists agree with Rhodes and stress that competence in listening cannot be recognised as only a cognitive process, arguing that effective or competent listening is a behavioural act. A competent or effective listener, they assert, must be able to respond appropriately and we can only know if a listener has responded appropriately if we can look at a response in relation to its stimulus:

When you take the co-creation of meaning seriously, you recognise that individuals engaged in the relational listening

process must constantly respond in order to provide feedback for their partners. Keep in mind that your partner can only judge the quality of your listening through the response you make to his overtures. He cannot read your mind; his conclusions about your listening effectiveness are based on your behaviour in the situation.

(Rhodes, 1993:221)

The dispute seems set to continue.

The preceding sections have offered an account of previous work by cognitive psychologists and have outlined the different ways in which such research has been taken forward within the present study. While aspects of individual cognitive processes certainly have been, and indeed continue to be, helpful to our developing understanding of listening, the focus on the individual listener has significant limitations. Sociocultural perspectives on learning and the transactional model of communication discussed in the following sections offer more helpful contexts within which listening can fruitfully be investigated.

### **The neglect of spoken language: an historical perspective**

As early as 1965, writers such as Andrew Wilkinson advocated the inclusion of oracy in any conception of literacy. The term 'oracy' was first coined by Wilkinson, who lamented the neglect of listening and talking within educational research. In his paper *Spoken English*, he called for listening and talking to be given significantly more prominence in pupils' day-to-day classroom work, and for educators to be made much more aware of the essential contribution that oral communication makes to pupil learning. He argued that:

When children ... are placed in situations where it becomes important for them to communicate – to discuss, to negotiate, to converse – with their fellows, with the staff, with other adults... This is basically how oracy grows: it is to be taught by the

creation of many and varied circumstances to which speech and listening are natural responses.

(Wilkinson, 1965: 59)

Wilkinson was certainly influential in encouraging the shift in focus of researchers towards oral communication in classrooms and, as we can see from the preceding quotation, he had clear views about the ways in which teachers could nurture and encourage pupils' oral competence. Interestingly, he viewed the development of skills in talking and listening as the result of exposure to 'many and varied circumstances to which speech and listening are natural responses'; in other words, interesting tasks and varied contexts, along with practice, will result in an improvement.

A number of writers have challenged the notion that listening competence develops naturally through practice. Since many children entering Primary 1 appear to have acquired – without systematic training – relatively adequate oral communication skills, it is assumed that through normal classroom activities at various educational levels pupils will develop listening skills sufficient to meet their needs. Testing this assumption, the American researchers Nichols and Stevens (1981) conducted an informal survey in which they investigated the percentage of pupils who could tell what their teachers were talking about when they stopped in the middle of their teaching. The investigators found that 90% of first graders, 80% of second graders, 43.7% of junior high students and 28% of senior high students could correctly answer the question.

Studies by Jones and Nichols (1983), among others, have reported that without direct listening training college students could only answer 50% of the items on an immediate recall test (covering material in a ten minute lecture) and 25% of the items on a delayed recall test.<sup>1</sup> These studies provide evidence that practice in listening does not sufficiently develop proficient listeners. Commenting on the effects of practice, Ebling (1990) cautions that:

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<sup>1</sup> With training, students answered 85% and 60% correctly.

Although we all learn experiences, there is no guarantee that we learn from experiences. In fact, it is possible to learn downright errors and second-rate methods from experience, as in playing golf without taking lessons from a professional .... it is only training in systematic method which enables us to correctly analyse situations so that we can truly learn from experiences.

(Ebling, 1990:13-4. Cited in Phillips, 1990)

Regarding the misconception that listening skills improve with practice and without direct teaching, it is difficult not to concur with Adler (1983:5), who concluded: 'how utterly amazing is the general assumption that the ability to listen well is a natural gift for which no training is required.' Interestingly, these comments echo those of the pupil informants within the present study who, when asked what their teachers could do to help them improve their skills in listening, consistently indicated that they wanted their teachers to *teach* them how to listen. Notwithstanding such criticisms, Wilkinson's conclusions reflect those of other researchers who investigated classroom talk during the 1960s and 1970s. Studies undertaken by Halliday et al (1964) and Rosen and Rosen (1973), who investigated communicative practices in a variety of different classrooms, illustrated the importance and value of classroom talk for pupils' learning.

In 1975 The Bullock Report (DES, 1975) confirmed the importance of oracy in the curriculum. Within this wide-ranging report the fundamental importance of talk at every stage in schooling was emphasised, the interaction of the four language outcomes – listening, talking, reading and writing – was highlighted and exploratory talk was recognised as a powerful means of learning. Research in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and in the UK continued to emphasise the important role of talk in learning (Barnes, 1976; Barnes and Todd, 1977; Webb and Cullian, 1983; Cambourne, 1988). Perhaps the best known of these early researchers were Barnes and his colleagues, who developed an analytic system for studying peer talk. This system, which was 'grounded' in the data as opposed to being derived from a pre-existing network of categories, integrated ideas from both conversational and discourse analysis, and their definitions of

*content frames* and *interaction frames* made it possible to investigate how pupils brought their frames of reference to the interaction situation and how these frames were jointly negotiated and developed. Barnes' approach to the analysis of the data resonates with the one adopted in the present study.

As a direct result of this research, three major national curriculum development programmes took place in England and Wales between 1987 and 1993: The National Writing Project, The National Oracy Project and the Language in the National Curriculum Project. These projects were unique in that they involved teachers, researchers, university academics, Her Majesty's Inspectorate and, importantly, the research was classroom based. The recurring message that emerged from all three was clear – talk had a central role to play in the development of children's knowledge and understanding. The decision to establish the National Oracy Project demonstrated that the importance of spoken language had finally been recognised.

In the twenty years following Barnes' early work, many other methods of analysing peer group interaction have been developed, the most influential of which have been that devised by Fisher (1993), Mercer, (1994, 1996) and Phillips (1991), researchers who were involved in the Spoken Language and New Technologies (SLANT) project (see Mercer, Phillips and Somekh, 1991). What was interesting in this approach was that it tried to investigate how children use talk to think together and it used the group as the unit of analysis rather than the individual. By taking a sociocultural approach to children's talk, it attempted to demonstrate that particular ways of talking permit social modes of thinking. As a result of these, and similar studies, more prominence was given to the concept of collaborative learning.



## **Learning: a sociocultural perspective**

Moving on from specific studies on listening, attention in the current section will now turn to the general account of/perspective on learning within which the current research into listening practices in classrooms is situated. The classroom-based research described in the preceding paragraphs took forward the theoretical stance of sociocultural psychologists such as Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1986) and Wood (1988), who called for a pedagogy where discourse played a central role in the formulation of meaning, and who emphasised the interrelationship between spoken language and learning. Vygotsky further made the point that thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. These psychologists highlighted what could be accomplished through oral language and emphasized its empowering potential, rather than simply seeing it as a vehicle for transmitting ideas. Consistent with this view of language, the sociocultural perspective on learning highlights the close relationship between the individual's learning and his or her social and cultural context.

Psychologists who follow a sociocultural approach see learning as being social in two important, but distinctly different, senses (Crook, 1994). First, learning is social in the sense that all of our higher intellectual functions are seen to depend on the symbol systems, the accumulated knowledge, established practices for reasoning and problem solving about specific subjects and 'tools' for thinking, that have been handed down to us by our cultures. These cultural products and 'tools' of thought have greatly magnified the possibilities of human thinking and experience. The genre and reader response theories discussed in Chapter 3, which emphasize the social and cultural features that affect meaning as reader and text interact, resonate with the sociocultural perspectives described above. Second, learning is also seen as inherently social in the second sense that a child's internalisation of the products and ways of reasoning of his culture are

greatly aided by supportive social interactions with adults or more experienced peers.

Psychologists of the sociocultural school have been strongly influenced by Vygotsky's concept of the *zone of proximal development*. Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development as: 'The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky, 1978:86). The accent here then is on social transaction, on the induction of a child into his or her local culture with the assistance of more knowledgeable, skilled members, not on *individual* exploration and autonomous performance. *Cooperation* is also emphasised. This is not a straightforward transmission of information to the child, but a view which seems to imply active collaboration, and dynamic joint activity between learner and teacher.

Wells (1999) discussed the concept of the *zone of proximal development* and noted that it appeared within Vygotsky's writings within two quite different contexts. In the first, the concept was presented as the assessment of children's intellectual abilities and, more specifically, as a more dynamic conception of intellectual potential than that represented by an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) score. In other words, operationally, the zone was defined by the difference between a child's test performances under two conditions: with or without assistance. In the second context the emphasis fell more heavily on instruction and, in particular, on its role in relation to the development of those higher functions that are characterised by conscious awareness and volition. In this context, the significance of the zone was that it determined the lower and upper bounds within which instruction should be pitched. What is significant however is that within both the emphasis is firmly placed on learning development, and on the role of adult assistance and guidance in enabling the

child to do *in collaboration* with more expert others what he or she is not yet able to do alone.

Much effort has been invested in the last quarter of a century by psychologists who investigated how children's learning has been supported and 'scaffolded' (Bruner, 1986) through social transactions with adults and/or peers. (For a full review of this literature, see Rogoff, 1990.) Others have focused on how specific cultural and semiotic tools impact on learning, studying how particular discursive practices shape our perception and interpretation of the world (e.g. Wertsch, 1991). A further group of psychologists has been strongly influenced by the passages within Vygotsky's writings which place learning within *a wider societal perspective*, and have examined how learning is enabled and constrained by organisational factors, power relations in school and workplace settings and 'macro' level features of society (e. g. Engström, Miettinen and Punaräki, 1999). Despite the different foci of their research, these psychologists have consistently supported the conclusions of educationalists, such as Britton (1987) and Wells (1987), that the case for the centrality of talking and listening, within any language curriculum, is unequivocal.

### **Transmission vs. transactional models of communication**

In 1992 Gordon Wells suggested that one of the main reasons for the failure to recognise the importance of spoken discourse was that the predominant model of communication in education has been one of information transfer and he discussed the two main pedagogical styles identified by Barnes in 1976 – transmission and interpretation. The former, according to Barnes, put the emphasis on pupils' ability to reproduce information while the latter was much more concerned with interactive discourse and cognitive processes. The transmission theory, Wells (1992: 289) argued, is completely incompatible with the theory of knowledge construction and cognitive learning:

Thus while it is true that one function of a text is to enable the listener to reconstruct the speaker's meaning as accurately as possible, there is a second and equally important function, which is to provide for the generation of new meaning as the listener makes sense of what the speaker says by responding to it in terms of his or her existing knowledge and current purposes. It is in this second 'dialogic' function that the text acts as what Lotman (1988) calls a 'thinking device'... since traditionally it has been the transmissional function which has dominated discourse in the classroom, the balance now needs to be shifted with much more attention being given to the dual function.

Reader response theorists, as we will see in Chapter 3, concurred with Wells' views and argued that there exists a similar dialogic function as readers interact with and respond to texts, creating different meanings as a result of their own unique experiences, prior knowledge and beliefs. Similar conclusions have been reached by communication theorists, who have challenged the view that communication is more than the interaction of a source and a receiver, and that we simply function in the process by decoding and encoding messages which are separate entities in themselves to be understood; rather, they suggest, we perform both functions within most communications. This perspective of communication has come to be known as the *transactional* perspective, a term that was also used by reader response theorists. Smith and Williamson (1981) offer a description of the transactional model of communication:

Both persons in the communication situation are participating simultaneously. They are mutually perceiving each other; and both persons (not just the sender) are making adjustments to messages exchanged within the transaction. Both parties are simultaneously listening to each other; they are simultaneously and mutually engaged in the process of creating meaning in a relationship.

(Smith and Williamson, 1981:16)

John Stewart, a proponent of the transactional perspective in interpersonal communication, emphasised the meaning centre of the process:

From a transactional perspective, human communication is a process of meaning creating rather than idea or message sending. When you're communicating, you're not transmitting your ideas to others but evoking their own ideas or meanings .... consequently, although the words you use are important, your communication is also significantly affected by the other person's mood, needs, goals, attitudes, assumptions, past experiences etc.

(Stewart, 1973:16)

Thus, as communicators we constantly use our communication skills, knowledge, attitudes and frame of reference to function in the entire process of understanding verbal and non-verbal messages. The transactional perspective on the process of communication is essential for understanding listening. Rhodes (1993) describes the transaction:

As I listen, I simultaneously 'speak' to you with my non-verbal responses, and periodically provide you with verbal responses. As you speak, you simultaneously 'listen' to the non-verbal messages, periodically tune into the verbal messages, and continuously adapt your communicative behaviours according to your assessment of the extent to which you feel you have been understood.

Rhodes (1993:32-33)

At the same time, Rhodes argues, both communicators listen to themselves. If neither communicator listens, understanding or misunderstanding, agreement or disagreement cannot be communicated. 'Any single message, then,' [where listening has not occurred] he concludes, 'reflects only one perspective, not a perspective shared by both of the participants.' Thus, listening is a relational process in the sense that communication occurs with listeners and speakers in transactional relationships. To be effective in this transactional relationship, the listener must develop a clear understanding of his or her frame of reference to know what perceptual filters are influencing responses to messages. Moreover, the effective listener needs to develop the necessary listening skills to interpret the messages, listen to self, and construct the feedback messages in the

communication transaction. Effective feedback is as vital to true communication as is an effective message.

It is evident that the listener assumes the most important, involved role as a communicator is this transactional view. In the old, linear model of communication, the speaker essentially 'pushed buttons' to get a listener response, while the interactional view provides for the use of feedback from the receiver. The transactional approach, however, describes the listener as integral to the process, participating fully throughout the communication, not just as one who responds to messages. It is apparent, also, that this full participation of the communicator extends to participation on an intrapersonal – that is, within the self – communication level. While engaged in interpersonal communication that is, with another — we likewise are engaged in communication with ourselves, listening to ourselves as communicators.

## **Summary**

To summarise, Chapter 2 of the literature review has placed the current thesis within the context of previous research into communication, and within that, listening specifically, and has drawn attention to the close relationship between developments in these areas and those in parallel research from a sociocultural perspective into classroom interaction and learning and teaching. The following chapter will consider the move from narrower definitions of literacy to broader sociocultural perspectives within genre theory, literary theory, metacognition and educational pedagogy.



### **Introduction**

The purpose of the previous Chapter was to situate the present thesis within the historical context of earlier work. The research of cognitive psychologists, which has concentrated mainly on the individual cognitive processes involved in listening, was discussed and the place of oral communication in the curriculum and our increasing awareness of its crucial importance for learning were also examined. Attention then shifted to research into learning and to the move from focusing mainly on the individual learner towards considering the wider sociocultural contexts within which learning occurs. The transactional model of communication was then explored.

The present Chapter will focus on the ways in which research into learning in a range of domains has shifted significantly in recent years towards the adoption of a wider sociocultural perspective. The move from narrow definitions of literacy, and what it means to be 'literate', will be discussed before attention is then focused on genre theory; reader response theories; metacognition; learning and teaching as communicative processes and the implications of developments in each of these domains for pedagogical practices.

### **Literacy: the shift from a traditional to a sociocultural perspective**

What has become clear from reviewing the literature on literacy is that there is no single, simple route to becoming 'literate'. Indeed, it could be argued that there are probably as many routes as there are literacy learners, because we all become literate within rich and varied social contexts and within our own unique human relationships. If we accept that literacy is socially defined and

sustained, then we must accept that we all come to literacy in slightly different ways (Cairney, 1995). But, what does it actually mean to be 'literate'? Early definitions of the term tended to be narrow and were articulated simply as the ability to read and write. Gee (1990) challenged this view and suggested that while the traditional meaning of the word literacy would appear to be innocent and obvious it was, in fact, no such thing. Literacy, he argued, as 'the ability to read and write', situates it within the individual person rather than in society:

The traditional view of literacy as the ability to read and write rips literacy out of its sociocultural contexts and treats it as an asocial cognitive skill with little or nothing to do with human relationships.

(Gee, 1990:23)

More recent definitions have recognised the interrelationship of reading and of writing with other ways of knowing and they acknowledge the social and cultural nature of literacy. One definition, formulated by the Australian Literacy and Language Policy Group (cited in Cairney, 1995), is that literacy is:

The ability to use written information and to write appropriately in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. It also includes the recognition and use of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing and critical thinking.

(Cairney, 1995:ix)

While there are certainly many different definitions in the literature which seek to define literacy in ways which go far beyond the traditional view, the crucial point is this: teachers who accept and adopt a broad definition of literacy – whatever that definition may be – will create different learning environments for their pupils, environments that recognise that literacy is a term that covers a varied and complex range of cultural practices. In later sections of this chapter an outline will be given of some of the different ways in which literacy and its pedagogical practices have been influenced by this theoretical shift in perspectives on learning and teaching.

## **An historical perspective**

In seeking to explain how such a significant shift in understanding has come about Cairney (1995) concluded, unsurprisingly, that there was no simple answer. Rather, he argued that it was the combined and overlapping impact of research within quite disparate traditions – communication theory, linguistics, psychology, literary theory, post structuralism – which has brought about a fundamental change to the ways in which literacy is conceived and defined. As a result of this, more recent research into literacy has been characterised by a shift away from viewing it simply as a cognitive skill to seeing it also as a cultural practice and has explored its social dimensions, particularly the ways in which it is socially constructed. Much that has been written since the early 1980s has investigated how literacy is used as a cultural tool to construct symbolic meanings and to engage with others. The work of earlier researchers who developed psycholinguistic theories of literacy learning which made us aware of the need to consider the learner in real world contexts, and of Vygotsky (1978) and those who were guided by his ideas as they explored the relationship between skilled and less skilled learners, has informed more recent research into the relationships that exist in classrooms and their role in supporting literacy development. Chapter 2 has discussed the evolving sociocultural theories of language learning that have built on the basic understanding that language is made as people act and react to one another. From this discussion were derived a number of key principles:

- people learn to be literate primarily in groups as they relate to others to accomplish social and communicative functions;
- literacy is purpose driven and context bound;
- people react to the actions of others as well as to set patterns of group interaction; and

- people may act and react to each other through sequences of actions, not just single acts. These actions primarily involve language, of which literacy is obviously a part, and related semiotic systems (e.g. group membership, school organisational frameworks).

Of crucial importance to our developing understanding of the ways in which literacy is informed and shaped by both cultural tools and social contexts is the work of the genre theorists.

## Genre theory

A genre is a specific type of writing. The term has commonly been used within literature to describe texts as belonging to a certain group with which they share common features; therefore, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Alan Bennett's *The Lady of Letters*<sup>1</sup> could both be called examples of drama. Both have been written to be performed and both have used recognised dramatic conventions. Both deal with similar themes (although no-one has actually been murdered in *The Lady of Letters*, it is all in the mind of the main character) and both employ the familiar narrative structure of setting the physical and temporal scene, introducing the main character, developing the plot, reaching a climax and arriving at some kind of resolution. But there the similarity ends. *Macbeth* has many characters who interact throughout the play to move the story on; but there is only one character in *The Lady of Letters* and the story is told by her in a sustained dramatic monologue during which she is mostly in her living room talking directly to the audience. This must mean of course that there are genres within genres, or sub-genres, or more refined genres. The picture is complex; and it is further complicated if we look at *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning, which is a poem, of course, and also an example of dramatic monologue.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Lady of Letters* by Alan Bennett. In Alan Bennett (1998) *The Complete Talking Heads*. London: BBC Consumer Publishing. Broadcast by BBC television, Autumn 1998.

Opportunities for confusion also arise within non-fiction texts. Wray and Lewis (1997) summarised the main purposes for writing non-fiction texts and the different kinds of writing (which they referred to as generic forms) that they were likely to give rise to. Thus, we have recounts, reports, explanations, procedures, persuasive writing and discussion. It is not always easy, however, for children to recognise and adopt the most appropriate generic form. Having been offered a 'real experience' and then invited to write about it, a writing task which lent itself readily to the procedural form, one pupil wrote a straightforward recount of the task she had just completed. The request, of course, invited a simple 'telling'. Having described this pupil's response, Wray and Lewis cautioned that:

Simply by making sure the purpose is explicit and signalling the type of writing by the way we word the writing task is not in itself enough. Even if the purpose for writing is clear children may still continue to write recounts when another form of writing might help them achieve their purpose more effectively.

(Wray and Lewis, 1997:116)

They concluded that we need to understand something about the *ways* different texts are structured in order that we may share this understanding with our pupils. For this, they pointed us to the recent work of genre theorists in Australia.

The use applied to the word 'genre' by advocates of the 'genre-based' approaches to writing development is far more specific than that outlined above. The term is used to refer to 'a social process which has some purpose' (Collerson, 1988:12). These genres, it is argued, arise within a specific culture. As a result of this a court hearing, church service or family meal could be considered genres (Cairney, 1992:124). These genres may have variations from one event to another but across specific uses of particular genres (e.g. church service) there are certain predictable elements and an accepted sequence of activities (Collerson, 1988). The reason for this is that the activities are carried out with a specific purpose or goal in mind. Christie (1990:12) described genres

in this way: 'any staged and culturally purposive activity leading to the creation of a text... to serve different social purposes.'

Harrison and McEvedy (1987:74) have provided a more restricted definition, but one which, in Cairney's opinion, probably reflects more accurately the way the term genre has been applied: 'by genre we mean the overall structuring of the text which characterises different forms of communication.' It would appear from these definitions that there is some confusion between the terms genre and register. Halliday (1978:45) described register in the following way: 'it refers to the fact that the language we speak or write varies according to the type of situation.'

Halliday suggested that the theory of register attempts to uncover this variation so that we can understand what situational factors determine what linguistic features. To understand register, we need to understand the context of the situation. In this way, he believes, we are able to predict the linguistic features that are likely to be associated with it. He sees the context of situation as having three elements: field, which is the setting in which language occurs; tenor, which refers to the relationship of the participants; and mode, which refers to the channel of communication adopted. These three factors together, he argued, determine the register. Harrison and McEvedy (1987:74-75) made a more direct reference to purpose and defined register as: 'a particular variety of language that characterises a particular social situation. Its linguistic patterns reflect the purpose of the participants in coming together.'

They then define genre more specifically as: 'the overall structuring of the text which characterises different forms of communication.' Derewianka (1990), on the other hand, tried to distinguish between genres mainly in terms of purpose and argued that the term *genre* refers to the way the schematic structure of a text helps it to achieve its purpose. Harrison and McEvedy, as we have seen, accepted the critical role that purpose plays in affecting register whereas



Derewianka uses purpose as a major element within the definition of genre. Clearly purpose has an impact on both register and genre. However, genre is concerned primarily with text structure (Cairney, 1992). Martin, Christie and Rothery (1987) defined genre in this way: 'in essence genre theory is a theory of language use...it is a staged, goal oriented social process.'

The problem is, as the positions outlined above illustrate, that it is difficult to discern a consistent model. As early as 1982 Gunther Kress conceded: 'I have used the term 'genre' in a quite non-technical and non-specific way: *mode of writing* might have been a better term'. In a later discussion (Kress, 1989) he suggested that:

Genre theory in education is not, at this stage, a highly unified body of theory. The contributors to this debate represent a significant range of distinctive positions. The debate ranges from the position which treats genres as fully determined in all essential characteristics and therefore as outside the scope of effective individual action, to positions which treat genres as relatively fluid structures, subject to actions of socially located individual agents.

(Kress, 1989:67)

This reveals a fundamental disagreement. Those who adopt the first position must be teaching pre-existing, fully determined forms within which there can be no variation, given the social context. Those who take the second will have to acknowledge that pupils, as they write, are dealing with relatively fluid structures and thus should construct their meaning according to their sense of the social situation.

There are two further key issues about which genre theorists are not agreed. The first is whether there exists a fixed number of genres. In 1982 Kress stated that 'there exists a small and fixed number of genres in any written tradition' but in 1987 he argued that 'genres change historically; hence new genres emerge over time and hence, too, what appears as 'the same' generic form at one level has recognisably distinct forms in different social groupings.' In 1989, however,

Christie and Rothery argued that 'most members of a given culture would participate in some dozens of these genres.' From this it would appear that we could count them. But in 1987 Kress described a pupil who appeared to be producing 'what was, in effect a new generic type. The text shows a generic mix, or blend; something not at all unusual in other kinds of text produced by competent writers and speakers.' Again we are faced with what seem to be fundamental disagreements; are there dozens of discrete genres which must be taught or is there an infinite number of possible blends which could conceivably challenge any attempts at linguistic classification?

Genre theorists have continued to argue that 'whole language' teachers have failed to give sufficient attention to specific knowledge about language and as a result of this they have disempowered their pupils. Their concerns are summarised as follows (from Cairney, 1995:125):

- genres ought to be consciously chosen by writers and their writing made to conform to the particular genre's structure
- structures of genres ought to be taught to pupils so that they will model their writing on the genre structure
- there is too much emphasis on the narrative form in primary schools which is poor preparation for working in the expository modes required by secondary schools and in the outside world
- teachers have a responsibility to make the language features explicit to their students.

These theorists have argued that pupils should be helped to achieve social empowerment through their writing:

Without the capacity to handle the written genres in which information is processed and understood in the contemporary world people will be truly left out, unable to participate in a world of increasingly sophisticated information, construction and exchange.

(Christie and Rothery, 1989:91)

Many writers have now accepted that there needs to be more of a focus on the structure of texts, and have suggested that teachers need to be more explicit when talking to pupils about language. Teachers, they believe, should introduce pupils to specific genres, provide models of these texts and jointly construct texts with pupils. Cairney (1992), however, added a note of caution and asked whether pupils do learn about the structure of specific genres simply by reading them and being invited to write for specific purposes, and he suggested that pupils learn about genre through the experience of literacy itself. The most important question, he claimed, was not *whether* there should be a focus on the genres of language but *how* this should be done. How should teachers talk about genres? How explicit should we be when talking about language? How should we use this knowledge to interact with our pupils as they write?

Cairney criticised the early work of Martin, Rothery, Christie and Kress for an apparent lack of concern for pedagogy, and argued that their approach seemed to be very directive, teacher-centred and text based in discussing language with genre having a central focus. He called for a more meaning-centred approach which allowed pupils to have a major role in setting the instructional agenda. In response to Cairney's criticisms, Martin (1993) claimed that the differences were mainly the result of his different conceptualisation of the role of scaffolding; Martin put the teacher into the role of the expert who provided the pupil with knowledge that he or she did not possess. Cairney, however, pointed out that while the teacher might indeed have knowledge which some pupils do not possess, it may well be the case that other pupils in the class possess that knowledge (or indeed possess knowledge that the teacher did not possess). The crucial point for him, however, was that *meaning* was central, not knowledge of text. Teachers should have a key and vital role as providers of essential scaffolding. There has been, he claimed, some disagreement about what constitutes scaffolding. However, the definition he has used is that it 'is a

process that someone uses to help another language learner engage in learning beyond his/her 'actual' level of development.'

As such, scaffolding is not the preserve of adults:

Above all, scaffolding is a response to another individual's attempt to learn and to make meaning. Hence, talk about genre should generally be in response to a student's attempt to make meaning. Talk about structure of language makes little sense apart from a student's purposeful attempts to read or write something of personal significance. We must avoid at all costs the temptation to focus on genre as an end in itself.

(Cairney, 1995:126)

Identifying genres and defining their elements may at first seem simple enough, but as we have seen earlier this is not the case. We need to question how uniform genres are over time, from situation to situation and from one use to another. Cairney (1992, 1995) argued that to define them too dogmatically is to run the risk of imposing on writers 'sanitised' forms. Genres change and are also deliberately modified and transformed for writer effect. Writers write with greater power when given control of their writing; one consequence of the genre-based approaches could be that control is taken away from the learners and placed back into the hands of their teachers.

Stratta and Dixon (1995) suggested that we should accept Kress's case for blends rather than invent new definitions for the ever-increasing number of possible factual genres. Then, they believe, 'we can begin to talk about classifying, describing appearance, describing behaviour, and so on as structural elements in certain blends rather than argue for a discrete genre with restricted definition.' They proposed that generic choices should be related in some way to speech acts since genres of writing derive from verbs like reporting, persuading, arguing, describing, instructing and explaining. There are many of these verbs in English and they can be divided up in a preliminary way into three (overlapping) families: external speech acts (instruct, explain); internal speech acts (reflect, ruminates); and dialogic speech acts (assent, dissent,

negotiate). In doing so, Stratta and Dixon argued, we will also have to take account of the fact that different listeners, or different readers, may well 'construe' the same situation and linguistic cues in different ways. We need to take account of the listener's and the reader's constructions – something that genre theorists have so far failed to do.

The importance of familiarising pupils with the structures of different genres of texts to support the individual cognitive processes of receiving aural and visual stimuli, attention and memory has been highlighted in Chapter 2. As will become clear in subsequent chapters, the present study throws light on how skilled teachers are able to engage in pedagogical practices which bring together and reflect the thinking of the different genre theorists discussed in the preceding paragraphs. Such practices focus not only on the teaching of the specific genre characteristics of a wide range of texts, but also on the ways in which this knowledge can support listeners in their search for meaning. Of central concern with regard to genre is how both individual processing and the social and cultural contexts within which the teaching and learning occur shape and influence *how* teachers teach and how pupils listen.

### **Reader response theories**

Literary theorists have also played their part in the development of sociocultural theories of literacy development, by challenging the long-held views concerning the centrality of the text and a whole body of theory and criticism has emerged around the role of the reader in making meaning. A number of those theories and ideas can be brought together under the umbrella term of 'reader response theory' (Thomas, 1998). As early as 1970 Stanley Fish, in his essay 'Literature and the Reader' made a clear and unambiguous statement that 'the meaning of the text lies in the activity of the reader'. His essay began by addressing that reader:

If at this moment someone were to ask 'What are you doing?' you might reply 'I am reading' and thereby acknowledge the fact that reading is an activity, something you *do*. No one would argue that the act of reading can take place in the absence of someone who reads – how can you tell the dance from the dancer?

Wolfgang Iser (1978, 1980) described the text as a set of incomplete instructions to be completed by the reader as gaps are filled as part of a constructive and predictive process. He presented the act of reading in prosaic terms. The image he used to illustrate the role of the reader who reads the literary work was to consider the work as having two poles, the artistic and the aesthetic. The artistic pole was the author's text, and Iser argued that in the past this had been regarded, in itself, as the literary work. He placed the realisation of the text by the reader, however, at the opposite pole which he labelled the aesthetic. The literary work, he argued, 'cannot be identical with the text or with its actualisation but must be situated somewhere between the two'.

Iser (1978) pointed to the interaction between any two people communicating with one another; neither can know the experience of the other. But as they communicate they make contact, form views, gain impressions, react to one another, all of which works on the gap that lies between them: 'contact, therefore, depends upon our continually filling in a central gap in our experience.' Iser acknowledged that there are obvious differences between communicating with a person individually and reading a text, but he highlighted one significant similarity. Our interaction in conversation forms that gap-filling process because we are different people with different experiences. To communicate with each other involves filling in the gap. He suggested that there is a similarity when we read: 'it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that gives rise to communication in the reading process'.



Eco (1979) argued that, when faced with a text, readers can, and, do, generate an unlimited number of meanings. Twenty years later Thomas (1998:23) highlighted the creative nature of the process:

Reading is essentially a creative act. I sat down and wrote the words you are now reading. If you didn't read those words their meaning would come to nothing. There is a sense in which the meaning of what I write will not exist unless you carry out the whole creative task of making sense of what I have written.

Recently, poststructuralist theories have had a significant influence on the move from literacy skill to literacy practice. Poststructuralism argued that people actively take on specific discourses through which they (and others to whom they relate) shape their world. We learn about literacy within a social context and as a relationship with other people. The meanings we create, therefore, are always relative:

Texts and the various ways of reading them do not flow full-blown out of the individual soul; they are the social and historical inventions of various groups of people. One always and only learns to interpret texts of a certain type and in certain ways through having access to, and ample experience in, social settings where texts of that type are read in those ways. One is socialised or enculturated into certain social practice. In fact, each of us is socialised into many such groups and social institutions.

(Gee, 1996:89)

What we think we know can never be removed from the social context within which we came to know. All texts are implicated in social relations (Cairney, 1995). The meanings we construct as we read and write reflect who we are, what we have experienced, what we know about language and the world and also our purposes for creating them in the first place (Cairney, 1990a; 1990b).

Karolides (2000) discussed this relationship between the reader and the text and suggested that, rather than being passive recipients of text, like empty vessels being filled, readers are actively involved during the process; they are not

spectators but performers *with* the text. Adopting a constructionist perspective on learning, Karolides argued that according to this central premise the literary work exists in the *transaction* between the reader and the text and, further, that the term *transaction* is meaningful in expressing the reader-text relationship during the reading event. It signals the connection between them and the nature of that connection. Transaction, then, denotes a situation of mutuality. During the reading activity the text and the reader mutually act on each other, each affecting and conditioning the other. Rosenblatt described this transactional relationship succinctly:

In discussion of the reading process, as in different disciplines, we need to free ourselves from unscrutinised assumptions implicit in the usual terminology and in the very structure of our language. The usual phrasing makes it difficult to attempt to do justice to the nature of the actual reading event. The reader, we can say, interprets the text. (The reader acts on the text). Or we can say, the text produces a response in the reader. (The text acts on the reader). Each of these phrasings, because it implies a single line of action by one separate element on another separate element, distorts that actual reading process. The relation between the reader and the text is not linear. It is a situation, an event at a particular time and place in which each element conditions the other.

(Rosenblatt, 1995:16)

Reading, thus defined, is a *transactional* process. This interpretation resonates with the discussion in the previous chapter, which highlighted the shift from simple, linear models of communication towards viewing it as a complex, dynamic transactional process, alive to initiating statement and response, within which each participant is actively involved in creating meaning. The reader's interpretation of a text is, like the listener's, influenced by his or her 'state of being' at a particular time or place and in a particular situation, as well as by their relationship to the text. Both the reader and the listener approach the words and structures within a text or message with a particular frame of mind formed by their own personal milieu. Responses will vary in connotation, expression and interpretation; shades of meaning, experientially induced, differing from one reader or listener to the next, may be affective. Over time

and region words may vary in denotation. Responses will be influenced by past experiences – or lack of them – and current circumstances, regional origins and upbringing, gender, age, and past and present ‘readings’. The reading situation, like the listening situation, is another dynamic factor, and a particular stimulus, mood or preoccupation, context or purpose, or stance taken will influence the transaction. These factors suggest not only that the transaction is particular to each reader or listener but also that it is an event in time. Thus, considering the breadth of experiences among readers and listeners at any one time and over time (as well as the same listener or reader over time), the range of possible ‘readings’ of a single text is potentially infinite.

The discussion of genre theories earlier in this chapter has highlighted the importance of alerting learners to specific features and structures of different genres of texts to provide them with prior knowledge of what might be encountered. Expectations of the text are projected; later features may confirm these expectations or may bring about a revision. Clues of context are perceived and integrated. What Karolides (2000) terms ‘scaffolds of understandings’ are constantly adjusted to account for the text’s many features. The process is thus reflective, demanding and recursive. Readers and listeners make choices, both conscious and unconscious; the concept of selective attention operates as semantic nuances, feelings, emotional attitudes and purposes for reading or listening create the realised experience. Social and cultural contextual differences are reflected within these choices.

The broader definitions of literacy highlighted above have recognised the relationship of reading to writing, have accepted that literacy has many forms beyond the printed book and view it as a social and cultural process rather than merely a set of cognitive skills. Because of this many authors have chosen to use the term ‘literacy practices’ since it recognises that there are many literacies, that literacy is crucial to much social activity and that it is interconnected with other cultural practices and specific contexts. Literacy is embedded in culture and

contributes to the shaping of it (Cairney, 1995, 1990a; 1990b). It is 'part of the very texture of wider practices that involve talk, interaction, values and beliefs' (Gee, 1996).

## **Metacognition**

Given that one of the main themes pursued in the discussion chapter, (Chapter 7), is the need to 'problematise' and extend current accounts of metacognition, it is necessary at this point to provide a clear and comprehensive review of key assumptions in earlier writings, and highlight the important debates which are currently taking place in the literature.

While there is a fairly substantial body of research focusing on metacognition in reading and writing there exists very little where the primary focus has been metacognition in listening. In light of the earlier account of the narrow definitions of literacy, however, in which listening and talking did not feature in any significant way until fairly recently, such a finding is unsurprising. When reviewing the literature on metacognition what quickly became clear was that there appeared to be some considerable degree of confusion about what the term actually meant, what characteristics were evident when learners were behaving metacognitively and what teaching behaviours were apparent when teachers were engaged in promoting, encouraging and modelling metacognitive approaches to learning. In the following sections a review will be offered of how metacognition is currently defined and conceptualised, and of the debates which continue within different domains. What emerges from this is a picture in which the limited focus within psychological research is revealed and, although within educational research the findings are slightly more encouraging, neither takes account of the results of the present study. In Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis, in which the teachers' and pupils' interviews are reported on respectively, both teachers and pupils reveal skills in, and

understanding of, metacognition and metacognitive behaviours which move beyond what is found in the literature. As a result of this there is a need to redefine the nature of metacognition and move towards a reconceptualisation.

### *The problems of definition*

In any discussion within the literature on metacognition two important and related issues quickly emerge: the first concerns the definition of metacognition and the second concerns the role of consciousness. A fundamental question is whether metacognition implies awareness of thoughts and conscious control of thinking or whether it can be implicit and unconscious. This question has been raised often (e.g. Hacker, 1998; Schraw and Impara, 2001; Carey and Reder, 2002) but it would appear that it is unlikely to be resolved through consensus because researchers from different academic domains, who have developed distinct methodological approaches and operational definitions, have arrived at different answers. These definitional issues must be addressed, however, as they frame the interpretations of how metacognition is studied, how it operates and why it is important.

Metacognition was first introduced into psychology by John Flavell and his colleagues, who conducted research into children's metamemory. As early enthusiasm for, and interest in, metamemory quickly spread to other domains such as attention, learning and communication, the broader term of metacognition gained popularity and came to be used as a blanket term for a number of quite different theories. Flavell (1979) described metacognition in terms of person, task and strategy knowledge and the ability to monitor and regulate our learning processes:

Metacognition refers to one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g. the learning-relevant properties of information or data. For example, I am engaging in metacognition ... if I notice that I am having more trouble learning A than B; if it strikes me that I



should double-check C before accepting it as a fact; if it occurs to me that I had better scrutinize each and every alternative in any multiple-choice type task situation before deciding which is the best one; if I sense that I had better make a note of D because I may forget it. Metacognition refers, among other things, to the active monitoring and conscious regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective.

(Flavell, 1976:908)

In 1978 Brown interpreted metacognition in terms of processes such as planning, monitoring and regulating. Wellman (1981) recognised and acknowledged the increasing confusion in definitions and referred to the concept of metacognition as a fuzzy concept:

First, the concept encompasses an essential, central distinction. However, this distinction serves to anchor the concept, not intentionally define it. Second, prototypic central instances of the concept are easily recognised. However, third, at the periphery, agreement as to whether an activity is legitimately metacognitive breaks down: the definitional boundaries are truly fuzzy. Related to this, and fourth, different processes, all of which partake of the original distinction, may be related only loosely one to another. Thus the term metacognition or metamemory serves primarily to designate a complex of associated phenomena.

(Wellman, 1981:337)

Brown (1987) went a step further, and suggested that:

Metacognition is not only a monster of obscure parentage, but a many-headed monster at that ... doubt remains concerning whether the domain(s) covered by metacognition will be tractable enough for a total systemization. The term itself should be pensioned-off or at least severely restricted in its extensional reference, not because the phenomena subsumed under the term are trivial but because they are central processes of change and development.

(Brown, 1987:31)

She identified four historically separate, but obviously interlinked, central issues of metacognition research: reports on one's own thinking; the role of executive components in information-processing systems; processes of self-regulation; and



processes of an individual's regulation by other persons. Some of the 'fuzziness' of the concept of metacognition has undoubtedly arisen from the fact that researchers have used the term in diverse ways. Some have restricted usage to what is known, excluding ways in which that knowledge is used (Cavanaugh and Perlmutter, 1982), while others have dubbed nearly all strategic actions as metacognitive (Brown, Bransford, Gerrera and Campione, 1983)

Research in the ensuing ten years did not use a single definition. Instead, researchers discussed both knowledge of and processes in mental states, abilities and operations as metacognitive (Alexander, Schallert and Hare, 1991). Paris and Winograd (1990) described these twin emphases as self-appraisal and self-management of thinking, definitions which pervade many subsequent studies of metacognition. These different functions are sometimes referred to as monitoring (i.e. appraisal) and control (i.e. management) and reveal the reciprocal nature of influence from task-mind and mind-task respectively (Paris, 2002).

Developmental researchers began to study metacognition within diverse research domains. They investigated at what ages young children gained various kinds of knowledge about the mental world, and posited that children's early theories of minds, both their own and others, are cornerstones of children's theories about the world, along with biological and physical theories (Wellman and Gelman, 1992). Developmental researchers' goals for metacognition were generally clarifying our understanding of thinking processes. In contrast, educational researchers examined how children understood knowledge and processes relevant to reading (Brown 1980), mathematics (Schoenfeld, 1992) and many other educational topics (Hacker, Dunlosky and Graesser, 1998). They studied how metacognition was related to age, achievement, motivation and intelligence (Borowski, Carr, Rellinger and Pressley, 1990; Swanson, 1990). They also incorporated the term into teaching and learning and investigated how children's metacognitive ability could be

developed through instruction, particularly instructional conversations that focussed on the use of specific strategies (Palincsar and Brown, 1984; Cross and Lipson, 1984). In other words, metacognition was viewed as a tool to facilitate learning rather than simply an object of study in its own right.

In cognitive psychology research into metacognition focussed mainly on adult memory and on the monitoring of cognitive states and the subsequent control of cognitive processes. Nelson and Narens (1990) discussed the three main types of research into metacognition in cognitive psychology – feelings of knowing (FOK), judgements of task difficulty and ease of learning (EOL), and judgements of learning (JOL). Within this research both monitoring and control were studied as the subjects attempted to learn or remember information and the measures determined (a) the basis for a metacognitive judgement and (b) the accuracy of a metacognitive judgement. One of the reasons this research grew independently from developmental and educational psychology and flourished was because it accorded readily with the information processing models of memory which were prevalent in the literature of the early 1990s. This line of enquiry focused on metacognition as the topic of study and analysed the accuracy and reliability of feelings and judgements under different conditions of recall, recognition and motivation (Koriat and Shitzer-Reichert, 2002). A further focus for research into metacognition within cognitive psychology concentrated on how such knowledge was used to answer questions, select strategies and guide thinking (Metcalf and Shimamura, 1994), a division within the field which reflected the dual nature of metacognition as both knowledge and process. Other interests have taken researchers with different theoretical perspectives, different goals, different methods and different subjects off in diverse directions; the result of this profusion of research interests and approaches within educational, developmental, psychological, cognitive and clinical research is that such interests and approaches have grown and developed independently and researchers differ widely on their views of metacognition and on how to study it.

Paris (2002), whose approach is rooted in children's purposive behaviour, such as goal-orientated behaviour that typically occurs in schools, is of particular interest within the context of the present study. Paris's interests lie in analysing how metacognition contributes to the successful accomplishment of a cognitive action, and he offers several points of clarification about an approach to metacognition which is grounded in developmental and educational issues. He acknowledges, however, how this may appear to be at odds with approaches grounded in cognitive psychology:

I think it is important to define metacognition in a manner that separates it from other types of cognitions. For me, that always has two key characteristics; one, the particular metacognition must pertain to a cognitive state (as opposed to a non-cognitive state), ability, or process, and two, that any metacognition must be available for public scrutiny. Usually this means that metacognition is verbalised, reported, and conscious but other ways of sharing knowledge publicly are possible. The main reason that I favour a definition of metacognition as conscious, aware and often deliberate is that it allows these kinds of thoughts to be measured, verified, or disproved. If they are not public or not measurable, how can their veracity or function be assessed? If metacognitions are defined as a broad category including unconscious or unmeasured thoughts, then they cannot serve useful explanatory roles because they are not available for empirical testing.

(Paris, 2002:107-8)

In expressing this view, Paris challenged Cary and Reder's (2002) assertion that metacognition can be implicit and unconscious, as well as explicit and conscious, and refuted their conclusion that awareness (metacognition) is not required for selective and adaptive use of strategies. He argued that an approach that does not distinguish between conscious and unconscious processes or between procedures and strategies is one that ignores the role of overt and deliberate knowledge in the guidance of thinking. Paris suggested that to offer a restricted definition of metacognition and strategies as conscious, and often deliberate, processes is to accord them a 'special status' which allows more precise research and explanation. To separate metacognitions from other

types of cognitions, he believes, is to facilitate the analysis of their distinctive attributes and functions which has important implications for learning and development. If metacognitions and strategies are, as he suggests, special cases of the larger set of mental thoughts and procedures that are important during learning and then become transformed and embedded into automatic sequences of thinking and acting, then we need to distinguish their developmental course and identify how teaching influences such automatization.

### *A functional perspective on metacognition*

There is a long history of different methods and purposes associated with structuralism and functionalism in psychology that are reflected in different approaches to the study of cognition today. Structural analyses examine the existence and quality of thoughts as ends in themselves, whereas functional analyses recognise the instrumental role that metacognition might play. Schunk (1996) summarised some key points about the functional perspective which reflect current thinking on the study of metacognition within educational contexts:

Functionalists were interested in how mental processes operate, what they accomplish, and how they vary with environmental conditions. They also saw the mind and the body not as existing separately but as interacting with each other. Functionalists opposed introspection as a method, not because it studied consciousness but rather because of how it studied consciousness. Introspection attempted to reduce consciousness to discrete elements, which functionalists believed was not possible. They contended that studying a phenomenon in isolation does not reveal how it contributes to an organism's survival.

(Schunk, 1996:27)

Researchers analysing metacognition for its own sake, claim those arguing from a structuralist perspective, run the risk of investigating thoughts dissociated from actions, purposes and contexts, which were the main criticisms of the earlier FOK or JOL experiments. To analyse metacognition without focussing

on purpose and context would be to miss out on genuine opportunities to investigate, within the social and cultural contexts of classroom, (a) how children regulate their own thinking, and (b) what their teachers do to encourage, support and enhance their pupils' skills in self-regulation:

Research needs to identify the conditions, motivation, and consequences of metacognition in order to understand the function it serves. A functional perspective on metacognition leads to five claims. Metacognition:

1. requires anchored theoretical analyses;
2. develops throughout childhood and the acquisition of expertise;
3. is motivated by actions of self and others;
4. is influenced by sociocultural practices;
5. has a range of consequences from negative to positive.

(Paris, 2002:110)

The conclusions reached by those arguing from a functional perspective resonate with the aim of the present study to investigate listening within the social and cultural context of classrooms. Purposes and contexts for listening are therefore central considerations, as are the pupils' regulation and control of their listening and the teachers' pedagogical practices designed explicitly to support, encourage and enhance such skills.

### *Anchored theoretical analyses*

Researchers from different areas have proposed ways in which metacognition could be anchored in, and connected to, different theories of learning and development. For example, Wellman and Gelman (1992) suggested ways in which metacognition could be connected to research on theory of mind. They identified three domains of children's cognitive development – biology, physics and psychology – in which children construct theories of variables and causal relationships, and argued that during this process metacognition must be part of children's growing knowledge. Previous research in this area has focused on very young children and the distinctions they draw between their minds and



those of others, or on accurate and inaccurate beliefs that they hold. Paris (2002) contends that: 'it seems plausible that 'other "theory theories" can be generated using theory of mind as a conceptual anchoring point'. In addition, Harter (1999), whose approach is contextual and functional, discussed theories of self-development, and argued that metacognition is a feature of self-referenced processes including thoughts about self-efficacy, self-control and self-competence.

A further way to anchor theories of metacognition would be to relate it directly to theories of learning and teaching. A number of instructional techniques have already gained support. For example, the ideas of Vygotsky (1962) and his apprenticeship model of the 'expert' teacher and the 'novice' learner, with the former supporting the latter as he operates within his 'zone of proximal development'; Bruner's metaphor of 'scaffolding learning', whereby the teacher supports the learner through teacher demonstration, joint activity, supported activity and individual activity, gradually withdrawing support as the learner assumes responsibility for his learning; and reciprocal teaching (Palincsar and Brown, 1984), which allows the teacher and the pupil to exchange roles and thereby increases the learner's awareness of the strategies being used by the teacher are examples of such techniques. Children learn three kinds of metacognitive knowledge during reciprocal teaching – declarative knowledge about strategies (which strategies are relevant), procedural knowledge (how to apply them) and conditional knowledge (why they are useful) but what remains unexplored, Paris (2002) suggests, are the ways in which that metacognition functions within various kinds of learning as well as in various kinds of teaching.

These proposals concerning the different ways in which accounts of metacognition could be developed further and anchored in other theories are certainly helpful in that they attempt to bring together disparate conceptualisations of what has been termed 'an orphan construct' (Brown,



1987). What is of particular interest within the present study into children's listening within the sociocultural contexts of classrooms, however, is that it would appear that this simply does not go far enough. Chapters 5 and 6, which report on the findings of the study, will point to the need to 'problematise' the concepts of 'executive control' and 'self-regulation', and to reconceptualise the term 'metacognition'. In addition, analysis of the teachers' pedagogical approaches highlights the limitations of current representations of 'teacher scaffolding' and of 'apprenticeship' and underlines the need to expand them in ways that take account of the practices observed and reported.

### *Developmental dimensions of metacognition*

Because metacognition has tended to be studied in distinct academic domains, such as reading and writing, it is reasonable to suggest that the developing awareness of children is tied to certain tasks. For example, we know that young children continue to decode words when reading even when meaning has completely broken down and we know that many older children do not reread, question the text, or use the context to help them to understand what they are reading. It would be possible to list such misunderstandings and misconceptions and to attribute them to inaccurate metacognitions. This would be a useful thing to do; there would be real advantages to having access to domain-specific descriptions of children's emerging awareness of variables that affect cognitive performance, since knowing what children know about cognitive tasks and how they think as they attempt to solve problems would provide a great deal of information that would be of diagnostic and instructional value to teachers.

Paris, Byrnes and Paris (2001) advocate syntheses of these developmental markers into larger theories of metacognitive development, and argue that it might be possible to chart the kinds of metacognition that children acquire from infancy through to adolescence. If metacognition is embedded in theory of

mind, then it might be possible to chart the kinds of metacognition that children acquire about their own minds from infancy to adolescence. Developmental changes in metacognition about tasks as a person progresses from novice to expert could also be examined. There may, they suggest, be similarities in the instrumental roles of metacognition whether misconceptions are due to age or lack of experience, but it is important to acknowledge and study sources of age-related and experience-related misconceptions. Harter (1999) suggests that if metacognition is cast in a framework of self-development, then perhaps the markers of awareness about personal and social cognitions can be organised by age, and she provides a model of normative stages of self-development that includes implicitly many metacognitive evaluations of self and others at each stage.

The value of such a developmental approach to both teachers and to learners cannot be underestimated. Teachers would have access to clearly articulated indicators of what they should be looking for at different stages in children's metacognitive development; and such information could guide not only their own teaching and explicit modelling of metacognitive strategies but could support and inform their diagnostic assessment of children as they progress through different stages. In addition, such assessment could be used to evaluate the success of their planning and teaching and help them to plan for future teaching. The implications for future curriculum development are also significant. The teacher informants within the present study offered clear accounts of the different ways in which they modelled metacognitive strategies to their pupils and of the ways in which they alerted pupils to the cognitive demands of tasks. They were less confident about their own ability to ensure that they were identifying accurately the developmental stages of pupils in terms of their metacognition and that they were making appropriate demands on them.

### *Motives for engaging in metacognition*

Paris and Paris, (2001) note that rarely is attention given to why an individual engages in metacognition at all:

One of the fundamental problems with research on metacognition has been the exclusive focus on the quality of the reported thoughts or the connections between metacognition and performance. Rarely is attention given to the reasons why an individual engages in metacognition at all. Vygotsky (1962) warned of the dangers of decontextualised analyses that lead to thoughts thinking themselves. Strictly cognitive analyses of metacognition run the same risk.

(Paris and Paris, 2001:89)

What are needed, they suggest, are analyses of the conditions and contexts that initiate or support metacognition. While such analyses are of use to those advocating a functional perspective on metacognition, they are usually avoided by those pursuing structural models of metacognition. Paris (2002) identifies two classes of stimuli for metacognition: thoughts engendered by self and thoughts engendered by others. The former has two primary sources. First, we stop to examine our own thinking when things do not make sense and we adopt a range of strategies to clarify understanding or sort out confusion. The second source of self-initiated metacognition occurs when we consider how we are presenting ourselves to others. "Does she think I'm clever because I'm able to do this?" Analysis of this question is a metacognition about someone else's thinking that causes the person asking it to modify their behaviour if they want the person to have certain thoughts about them. The second class of motives involve other people who cause us to think about cognitive states and abilities, and again sense-making and self-presentation are obvious interpersonal stimuli for metacognition. "What does that mean?"; "Why did he say that?" The other person provides cues for us to examine what we are thinking and how we are acting as we engage in metacognitive deliberations.

There are other possible motives for metacognition, to be sure, but these few illustrate both internal and external causes to jump off the automatic track of routine behaviour and engage in self-examination. When the targets of the self-examination are cognitive knowledge and abilities, their outcomes are metacognitive ... my point here is that we need to restrict our analyses to what motivates people to think about cognition. Without considering the reasons for being metacognitive, it is impossible to examine the consequences of metacognition, and without examining the consequences, we cannot determine if the thoughts are functional, useful, adaptive or valuable for the individual.

(Paris, 2002:114)

### *Contextual influences*

Metacognition cannot be removed from context and studied independently of the task or the purpose. The perspective on situated learning, discussed earlier in the preceding chapter in relation to literacy and learning, embeds thinking in the social and cultural practices of groups and thus metacognition, by extension, should also be examined as part of a community's practices. There are several ways in which this could be done.

First, it is possible to view metacognition as a practice if we consider the different ways in which communities make thinking public. For example, teachers who emphasise 'thinking skills' and 'learning to learn' within their classrooms are explicitly describing approaches to thinking, to learning and to studying. In light of this it is possible to argue that the key feature of all metacognitive interventions in schools is the explicit and public discussions on how to think. Such programmes include the teacher modelling and scaffolding approaches discussed earlier. The important point here is that discussions with children about cognition and about how they think, at their own level, will help them to become more aware of their own thinking processes and offer them strategies for tackling problems. Similarly, children whose parents provide opportunities for them to engage in discussions about thinking, learning,

reasoning, and remembering will benefit from such interactions within these social, cultural and situated contexts.

Second, while there may indeed be an implicit focus on metacognition within ordinary and daily practices, the same practices may be accompanied by explicit direct teaching. Declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge about strategies may be taught in schools to children learning to read or write or draw or swim, or to children at home learning to manage their feelings when parents are divorcing or when the family experiences a death, but the important point is that approaches vary considerably from school to school, from family to family, from country to country and from culture to culture. Finally, the influence of cultural beliefs concerning the value of metacognition requires further consideration. Metacognition is valued, expressed, taught, and supported to different degrees by different cultural communities, and the origins and practices that imbue metacognition with value should be studied.

### *Consequences of metacognition*

Several writers have discussed the instrumental role of metacognition within different contexts and situations and have concluded that, while it can frequently be positive in that it can enhance performance, it can also be negative, debilitating, destructive and in some instances even dangerous (Metcalfe and Shimamura, 1994; Perfect and Schwartz, 2002). Paris (2002) suggests that it is relatively straightforward to identify those instances when metacognition is formative, i.e. 'when thinking about thinking leads to better ideas, decisions, actions and performance'. It is important during the acquisition of a skill, when the teacher breaks down a complex task into a set of smaller skills, helps the learner to see how to do each one, and then demonstrates how to put the component pieces back together. This is what Vygotsky (1962) called 'defossilisation'. For example, when children are being taught to write in a particular form, teachers would first of all establish what is



already known about both the subject matter and the deeper structural markers of that form. Successful models of writing would then be discussed, examined, analysed, and broken down into component parts and children would be taught to recognise the decisions that the writer had made about his writing, decisions which depended on and were influenced by the purpose of and audience for that writing. Tone, choice of language, style, and syntax would then be scrutinised to establish their appropriateness. Children would be supported through the different stages as they began to work collaboratively with their teacher to plan their own writing; to make decisions about the different elements of that writing; to draft and redraft; and to prepare the final version (Wray, 1994). Good teaching, therefore, helps children to break the task down into its component pieces, makes them aware of these elements and their relationships, and then provides tactics to help children to put them back together again, to reassemble them. It is important to note here, however, that breaking down tasks in this way is only helpful if it makes children aware of previously unknown facts and relations; decontextualised analyses of complex acts can become tedious and boring.

From this account it is evident that metacognition can be both formative and beneficial during teaching. Good and effective teachers know how to 'defossilise' their behaviour and how to explain the component parts of any activity; they are aware of the demands of tasks and of how to present them to individual pupils; they understand how to stimulate the learner's metacognitions; and they know how to explain the processes of thinking at the level the learner can understand and employ. In this sense, *teaching* is therefore in the 'zone of proximal development' and the best teachers are able to include both direct and subtle stimuli for metacognition which motivate, stimulate and challenge the learners. The extent to which the teachers observed in this study are able not only to teach 'in the zone of proximal development' in the ways described above, but to engage in pedagogical practices which move beyond the preceding account will be delineated in the discussion of the findings.



Finally, it is important to be alert to those instances when metacognition, where the focus is on perceived ability, can result in negative outcomes, and within the context of the school the most common of these are pupils' negative self-evaluation or self-beliefs. Many children have persistent, deep-seated negative beliefs about their lack of ability and their metacognitions lead them to profoundly depressing negative self-evaluations. They are unable to 'buy into' self-worth theories of motivation and of learning.

Self-worth theory states that, in some circumstances, pupils stand to gain a great deal by not trying. It is based on the notion that much of a pupil's behaviour is designed to maintain a self-concept of high ability and it is important to avoid failure since failure carries with it implications of low ability. When failure is unavoidable, low ability inferences can be deflected by attributing it to stable, external factors e.g. task difficulty, or to unstable elements, e.g. luck or effort. From this perspective the application of effort under conditions of possible failure, particularly competitive failure, can be risky; if the pupil tries and fails then suspicions of low ability are increased. After failure, therefore, a reduction in, or a withdrawal of, effort can be used as a strategy to prevent further damage to self-worth. The consequences of withdrawal of effort are decreased persistence and achievement levels. This disposition to establish and defend a positive self-image is what Wyllie (1979) calls the 'self-worth motive'. The theory assumes that the search for self-acceptance is the highest human priority and that in schools self-acceptance comes to depend on one's ability to achieve competitively (Covington, 1987; Covington and Beery, 1976).

Research would suggest that teachers are not skilled in identifying individual differences in children's self-beliefs. Carr and Kurtz (1991) attempted to determine the accuracy of predictors of teachers' metacognitive and motivational evaluations of their students. Research has shown that teachers' expectations of students' abilities affect the type and amount of feedback they

give and the cognitive and motivational demands they place on students. These factors, in turn, influence student performances and their assessment of their own ability. By measuring the students' actual self-concepts, metacognitive knowledge and attributions the researchers felt that they were able to assess the accuracy of the teachers' predictions as well as student characteristics that influenced those predictions.

Carr and Kurtz found that teachers were only moderately accurate in their predictions of students' metacognitive knowledge and self-concept, but not accurate in their perceptions of children's attitudinal beliefs. They then did a series of regression analyses, using teachers' reported perceptions of their students' metacognitive knowledge, academic ability, self-concept and attributions (effort and ability) as variables, and students metacognitive knowledge, attributions (effort and ability) as criterion variables.

Regression analyses examining student characteristics as predictors of teacher judgements showed that while teachers accurately evaluated children's metacognitive knowledge, their evaluations of self-concept and attributions did not reflect inter-individual differences among children on those variables. Their data supported the view that teachers perceived high achievers as having greater metacognitive knowledge, more positive self-concepts and stronger ability and effort attributions. Teachers' perceptions, they concluded, thus reflected a lack of fine-tuning, failing to distinguish, for instance, high achievers who were low in self-concept from their high-achieving, highly confident peers. Teachers assumed therefore, that high achievement was paralleled by positive self-regard. They also showed achievement-group biases in their evaluations of children's attributions and they failed especially in their evaluations of children's attitudinal beliefs. Carr and Kurtz concluded:

These findings have significant implications for education, suggesting that teachers do not attend to individual differences in student concepts and attributional beliefs and tend to overgeneralise

their evaluations of students on the basis of achievement. Their inaccurate evaluations of children's self-beliefs may be particularly detrimental, since children's belief about their abilities and the importance of effortful strategy deployment are believed to interact with their cognitive and metacognitive skills in influencing achievement.

(Carr and Kurtz 1991:200)

These systematic misconceptions on the part of teachers are not trivial, since children's belief systems are influenced by their teachers by means of attitudes and teaching practices. The implications for classroom practice are evident; if teachers can find ways of developing a finer understanding of pupils' motivational and affective status, as well as their cognitive abilities, the result will be not only more effective teaching practices but improved pupil attainment.

### **Teaching and learning as communicative processes**

The preceding chapter discussed the move in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s towards exploring teaching and learning as communicative processes, and viewing language as a personal resource and a social construct rather than simply separate objects of study (Green and Dixon, 1993). Britton (1970), Barnes et al (1971) and Halliday (1978) began to study the relationship of language to learning and their work was enhanced by that of educators, psychologists, sociologists and linguists in language and literacy education. In the 1980s and 1990s the focus broadened to include anthropology, semiotics and historical research. It was during this latter phase of research that there was an increased interest in the sociocultural nature of language and literacy and preconceived notions of how language was constructed were challenged. These researchers argued that oral and written language, though without doubt intrinsically different, were nevertheless intricately woven with each other in the life of the classroom. They concluded that it is virtually impossible to read or write in

classrooms without talking and, conversely, that talking frequently leads to reading and writing.

In discussing the work of these researchers Cairney (1995) concurred with their conclusion that spoken and written language are closely related aspects of classroom discourse and Gee (1996), while exploring how children learned to read and write, introduced the notion of 'being apprenticed to a social group.' As a consequence of this, he argued, the meanings we construct when we read and write reflect not only who we are and what we have experienced in our lives that is unique to us as individuals but also what we know about language and the world and also our purposes for creating these meanings in the first place (Cairney, 1990a; 1990b). Types of discourse, and the way we read or write them, are the social constructs of specific groups. Individuals are 'apprenticed' into these practices and these meanings as they read and write and talk about reading and writing. The classrooms in which teachers and their pupils work each day are what Cairney described as 'interactively constituted'. That is:

Classroom life is constituted in and through the patterns of relationships among processes for constructing oral and written texts. Text is viewed as constructed in action, language is viewed as in use (social action) and meaning is defined within context.

(Floriani, 1993:243. Cited in Cairney, 1996:32)

As Gee (1990) pointed out, schools engage in particular discourses and to be a pupil or a teacher in a school requires us to use language, to behave and interact in certain ways and to adhere to a particular set of values and attitudes. The ways in which we read and write, he suggested, are essentially the social constructs of specific groups – in this case the school classroom. Classrooms are therefore places where knowledge is constructed as specific interactions between participants as part of the learning and teaching process. Cairney (1996) accepted this idea but took it further and argued that each school – indeed each classroom – was in fact a unique social construct:

While schools and classes may share specific behavioural (e.g. participant roles), organisational (e.g. grouping, teaching strategies) and resource (e.g. curricula, texts) characteristics, they are all unique social constructs which are reflective of the specific backgrounds of their students and teachers as well as the texts that are acknowledged and valued in their classrooms.

Cairney (1996:32)

Research by Heras (1993) suggested that all classrooms have a range of:

Lived opportunities, possibilities and constraints opened up... (and dependent) on the configurations made possible by the institutional organisation of the school and the classroom *and* by the social and academic interactions within those institutional spaces.

(Heras, 1993:276)

Knowledge, he concluded, is always inextricably related to the opportunities pupils have to relate to and to interact with each other. Fernie et al (1993) suggested that within any classroom each pupil is involved in the complex negotiation and re-negotiation of roles, responsibilities, norms and expectations, each pupil from his or her unique position and Heap (1991) believed that teachers and pupils share a joint responsibility for the creation of the learning contexts within which they operate, for defining the content of what was learned and the situated roles and relationships, and for the definition of what, within that context, counts as knowledge. This was confirmed by the work of Gutierrez (1993, cited in Cairney, 1996), who investigated the effect of writing process instruction on primary and secondary pupils. Gutierrez found that differences between classrooms were characterised by specific participation structures – social hierarchies, discourse and interactional patterns and knowledge exchange systems. In addition, she noted that the various patterns of social interaction, discourse and classroom activities form ‘scripts’ which are of three main types: recitation, which are characterised by significant teacher intervention and limited opportunities for pupils to interact and collaborate with peers; responsive, which are also teacher managed but have boundaries

and participation structures that were far more relaxed; and responsive/collaborative, which comprise highly interactive leaning contexts in which both the discourse and the knowledge are jointly constructed and where writing is 'not seen as a method but as a socially negotiated process of constructing oral and written texts, of interacting with others about texts and of generating texts'. It is clear from her work that the differences between these classrooms lead to the construction of different models of literacy, rather than a single unitary definition.

### **Implications for pedagogy: 'apprenticeship models' and 'scaffolding' children's learning**

It is obvious that all of this has significant implications for classroom practice. From this brief description of the work of Gutierrez, it is clear that the ways in which teachers structure learning opportunities have a significant influence on the forms of literacy that are valued within individual classrooms. It has been demonstrated that the ways in which classroom language is controlled and directed by the teacher influences how pupils interact with, and construct texts; that the forms of spoken language which appear to the pupils to be valued by the teacher have a direct relationship to pupils' learning; that the knowledge that pupils can gain is closely related to the opportunities they have to relate to and interact with one another; and the 'patterns of social action, discourse and classroom activities sanctioned by the teacher and by the pupils lead to the formation of specific 'scripts' or frameworks which inevitably place limits on the types of knowledge and literacy constructed and used in the classroom' (Gutierrez, 1993). Returning now to the concept of scaffolding, which was introduced briefly in the previous chapter, a more detailed account will be given of the implications of such approaches for effective pedagogy.



Building on and developing further the ideas of Vygotsky (1978), Barbara Rogoff (1990) used the term 'apprenticeship' to describe how children learned. Rogoff suggested that children are apprentices in thinking:

Active in their efforts to learn from observing and participating with peers and more skilled members of their society, developing skills to handle culturally defined problems with available tools, and building from these givens to construct new solutions within the context of sociocultural activity.

(Rogoff, 1990:7)

Central to her notion of being apprenticed in thinking is the work of Vygotsky, whose theory suggested that higher order processes like literacy can only be acquired through interaction with others, and at some later stage will begin to be carried out independently. Vygotsky, who challenged the work of Piaget and his notion of developmentally appropriate learning, suggested that there were, in fact, two developmental levels: the 'actual development' which is the level of development of a child's mental functions determined by actual problem solving, and the 'potential development' i.e. what a child can do when supported during a task. Vygotsky suggested that the gap between these two forms of development, the *zone of proximal development*, indicated 'the functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturing'. It is this ZPD, according to Vygotsky, which is critical for learning and instruction and is where the most profitable teaching could proceed. He proposed that children should first experience a particular cognitive activity in collaboration with expert practitioners. First, the child is a spectator as the majority of the cognitive work is done by the expert (parent or teacher), then a novice as he or she starts to take over some of the work under the close supervision of the expert. As the child grows in experience and capability in performing the task, the expert passes over greater and greater responsibility but still acts as guide, assisting the child at problematic points. Eventually the child assumes full responsibility for the task with the expert still present in the role of supportive audience.

This model of teaching is based on the twin ideas of 'expert scaffolding', a concept devised by Bruner (1983, 1986), and 'proleptic' teaching (that is, teaching in anticipation of competence). There appear to be four stages<sup>2</sup> to the teaching process implied by this model:

- *demonstration*, where the expert models the skilful behaviour being taught. There is some evidence that learning can be assisted if this metacognitive modelling is accompanied by a commentary by the expert (think-alouds) which allows the learner to have access to the thought processes – their mental processes rather than simply procedures – of the expert as he or she engages in the activity (Tonjes, 1988);
- *joint activity*, where the expert and the learner share the activity;
- *supported activity*, where the learner undertakes the activity alone, but under the watchful eye of the expert who is ready to step in if necessary;
- *individual activity*, where the learner assumes sole responsibility for the activity.

Rogoff (1990) pointed out that the ZPD is 'a dynamic region of sensitivity to learning the skills of culture in which children develop through participation in problem solving with more experienced members of a group.' Cole (1985) took this idea further and argued that within the ZPD culture and cognition create each other. Vygotsky (1978) stressed the point that teaching geared towards developmental levels already achieved will be ineffective and argued that 'the only good learning is that in advance of development'.

While there have certainly been some criticisms of this process of scaffolding children's learning – for example, some writers have argued that there is too much control in the hands of the teacher; that the teacher is manipulating and simplifying the learning environment; that language learning is reduced to a series of stimulus-response relationships – Cairney (1995) argued that such

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is reasonable to identify these four stages it is not the case, of course, that they will occur in a neat, linear sequence; rather, learners will move backwards and forwards between stages depending on their levels of understanding and confidence when working on tasks.

criticisms mistakenly reduce the role of the teacher within the interaction to that of a participant with identical knowledge and status within the classroom (which is obviously not the case) and ignores the important functions that teachers have to perform as they teach. Furthermore, while two participants may indeed help each other to construct a text, each must ultimately make his or her own text. Rogoff (1990) reminded us that cognition and thinking are 'broadly' problem solving and highlighted the active nature of exploring, solving and remembering, rather than simply acquiring memories, precepts and skills. Her concept of *guided participation*, which involves a *collaborative process* of 'building bridges from children's present understanding and skills to reach new understandings and skills' is useful to explain how Vygotsky's views on learning can be put into practice since it suggests collaboration, a shared focus and purpose and involves cognitive, social and emotional exchange between partners in learning.

Her work, therefore, emphasised the active *participation* of learners in their own development. The teacher may offer new knowledge or demonstrate strategies but this need not necessarily be through explicit, direct teaching, in contrast to that described by Vygotsky and Bruner. Scaffolding and guided participation are of critical importance to any discussion concerning the teacher's role in pupil learning. The teacher must provide access to and regulate the difficulty of tasks; he or she must structure children's learning through joint participation; and he or she must create 'supported situations' in which pupils can extend existing skills and knowledge. Scaffolding is of critical importance here; it describes behaviour designed to help a pupil engage in some aspect of learning beyond 'his or her actual level of development'.

This shift in theoretical conceptions of learning, which is outlined in the preceding discussion of 'scaffolding' – from what Lemke (1990) called the 'triadic dialogue' sequence which was strictly controlled by the teacher towards collaborative negotiation in classrooms – has had a significant effect on the

nature of social interactions within classrooms. Wells (1999) noted that in many secondary schools it was estimated that the traditionally structured discourse patterns (i.e. initiation by the teacher, usually in the form of a question; response from the pupil; feedback from teacher (IRF)) accounted for 70% of all the discourse that takes place between pupils and teachers. Kumpulainen and Wray (2002) however, argued that while the identification of such sequences has increased our understanding of the transactional exchanges between teachers and pupils, and has highlighted the unequal communicative rights often present in transmission classrooms, it has shed little light on the communicative functions of interactions and on their consequences for the construction of meaning in the social context of the classroom. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, cited in Kumpulainen and Wray, 2002) seemed simply to assume that the triadic dialogue is the 'unmarked mode of classroom interaction' and that teachers adopt this mode by default. Mercer (1992), on the other hand, recognised the value inherent in triadic dialogue and justified his conclusions in terms of 'the model's potential to allow the teacher to monitor children's knowledge and understanding, to guide their learning and to highlight what is viewed to be educationally significant or valuable'. Newman, Griffin and Cole (1989) argued that because of its very structure the triadic dialogue has an in-built repair opportunity whereby pupils' wrong answers can immediately be replaced by correct ones by the teacher.

Unsurprisingly a number of writers have criticised what they perceive to be an overuse of this discourse format. Wood (1992) suggested that if teachers really wanted pupils to ask questions of their own, they should adopt a 'less controlling type of discourse' and Lemke (1990) believed that it was often used in the mistaken belief that it encouraged pupils to participate in classroom interactions.

Wells (1999) discussed these disagreements and expressed surprise that, regardless of their respective sides in the argument, these researchers all appeal



to sociocultural theory to justify their positions. He suggested that there are two possible reasons for this apparent inconsistency: the first is a result of tension within sociocultural theory itself between the two main goals of education, cultural reproduction and individual development and the second is the misperception that the occasions where triadic dialogue occur are essentially similar. With regard to the former, those who endorse triadic dialogue appeared to be concerned with the cultural reproduction, while those who challenged it are concerned with cultural renewal and the empowerment of individuals. With regard to the latter, Wells reminded us that, depending on the skill of the teacher, the same discourse format can result in very different levels of pupil involvement in different contexts and for different purposes. He concluded, therefore, that triadic dialogue was neither good nor bad; rather, its strengths and weaknesses depended on its purposes, the contexts in which it is used, and the wider aims of its use.

Reciprocal teaching, which was developed by Palincsar and Brown (1984), built on the work of Bruner. Here pupils and their teacher read and analyse texts together in small groups to improve pupils' reading comprehension. The teacher 'scaffolds' the pupils during group interactions using the strategies of questioning, clarifying, summarizing and predicting. Initially the teacher assumes responsibility for modelling these strategies, for responding to pupils' ideas and for keeping the discussion going. As the pupils gain in experience and confidence they gradually assume more of the leadership role, the teacher withdraws the support, and the groups work on increasingly difficult texts fairly independently. Rosenshine and Meister (1994) reviewed the literature on reciprocal teaching and concluded that it has had, and continues to have, beneficial effects across a wide range of classroom contexts and subject disciplines.

More recently Brown and Renshaw (2000) developed a model for classroom interaction which they called *collective argumentation*. Pupils are introduced to

the skills of representation, comparison, explanation, justification, agreement and validation, which are to be used at different stages in their small group discussions. As with Palincsar and Brown, the teacher initially assumes responsibility for helping the pupils to clarify the nature of their task and to share their views. The teacher reminds the pupils of the accepted norms of group interaction, and models for them, for example, how to construct an argument; build on others' ideas; develop and justify points made; and refute and challenge others' views. The group must present the outcome of their discussions to the class who in turn will evaluate the work of the group. Again, the teacher will model for the pupils how to make appropriate evaluative comments in such a way as to promote further positive interaction and will demonstrate how to avoid confrontational situations.

In two recent studies Pylvänäinen, Vasama and Kumpulainen (2002) and Kovalainen, Kumpulainen and Vasama (2002) (discussed by Kumpulainen and Wray, 2002) have moved beyond concentrating on the provision of cognitive support for pupils and focus also on social and socio-emotional processes. They highlight what they term the 'four modes of teacher participation in collective enquiry – evocative, facilitative, collective and appreciative modes of teacher participation in classroom interaction.' In the evocative mode of participation teachers are encouraged to allow pupils to ask questions, initiate and articulate their own ideas, and assume a joint responsibility for the choice and control of the topic. The underlying principle here is that teaching which encourages freedom of choice and expression on the part of pupils will promote active participation in interaction and learning. In the facilitative mode the teacher is not solely responsible for the scaffolding. Rather, there is a shared responsibility and understandings and meanings are socially negotiated, shaped by both the teacher's and the pupils' views, ideas and perspectives. In the collective mode the teacher's participation in the joint enquiry is viewed as equal. The teacher uses different strategies to encourage participation, to promote collective responsibility and to promote pupils' positive views of



themselves as members of the learning community. The teacher's appreciative mode of participation is important for scaffolding pupils' reasoning processes and should be evident in his or her response to pupils' ideas and in his or her participation throughout the inquiry. The teacher should make it clear that he or she is also a learner and that being a member of the classroom learning community is both rewarding and enjoyable.

## **Summary**

In this chapter the shift towards broader definitions of literacy from a sociocultural perspective has been explored; similar developments in genre and reader response theories have been outlined; an account has been given of metacognition and teaching and learning as communicative practices have been discussed. A number of significant pedagogical approaches, developed as a result of these shifts, have been outlined. In the following chapter, Chapter 4, methodological issues and decisions and the approaches adopted within the study will be described and justified.

## Introduction

Although it is customary practice to structure an account of methodological considerations and decisions by first providing a general review of the relevant literature on research methods, and then outlining and justifying the particular methods employed within a study, the strategy adopted in the current chapter is one in which both parts have been interwoven in an attempt to form a coherent whole. Several key factors informed this decision, the most important of which were the desire to ensure clarity of exposition and to make the research methods and the data gathered as visible as possible. Consequently, following on from a brief account of the debates surrounding quantitative *vs* qualitative research methods and of issues related to validity, each stage of the present study will be described and research decisions explained and justified by drawing on the relevant theoretical research literature.

## Postmodernism, reader response theories and validation

Much has been written about the problems that social scientists have faced in trying to find ways of taking the research methods that have been used in investigations in the natural sciences and applying them to human affairs through disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, sociology and education. Such methods emphasised human power to understand reality through rational enquiry and, in natural sciences in particular, through experimentation. The central idea is that there are objective facts 'out there' to be discovered by rigorous enquiry, leading to laws or generalisations that describe the world and allow good predictions to be made. *Positivism* is the term often used to explain

the procedures for gaining and describing knowledge typically associated with the natural sciences.

Arguably it is possible to see law-like regularities in the behaviour of millions of people over long periods of time, though this is disputed, and when it comes to studying smaller groups in the shorter term positivism has its limits:

People respond to specific situations *as they see them* and they make value-led choices. Even where it seems possible to make law-like statements about human thought and behaviour, those statements tend to be very loose and general. And those statements do little to help us understand *why* people act as they do.

(Arksey and Knight, 1999:10)

Alternative qualitative approaches concentrate on understanding the thinking and behaviours of groups and individuals in specific situations. These approaches direct attention to the differences and particularities in social settings and prompt us to discover what people think, what happens and why. Such research, according to Arksey and Knight (1999), should give authentic accounts of human thought, feeling and actions while recognising that those accounts do not apply to all people and that they do not allow predictions to be made in the same way that they are made in the positivist natural sciences.

The long-running debate about the best approach to research in social science however has largely missed the point that methods have to be fit for their purpose. Donmoyer (1996) suggests that many studies would benefit from different approaches for different purposes at different stages of the research. Furthermore, the realist assumption that better methods would give a better picture of the way things really are has been challenged by researchers who adhere to postmodern thinking. In essence, postmodernism emphasises the diversity of meanings and their fluidity and also insists that all accounts are not only created by their writer but also that all writings are interpreted by the reader, and not necessarily in the way that the author intended. In short, the

idea of a reality to be discovered is denied. Researchers, Denzin (1992) argues, 'invariably use the lens of their own selves when they examine human affairs – the objective researcher does not and cannot exist, so all accounts of 'reality' are, in fact, visions of 'reality''. A similar argument is advanced by Griffiths (1995:52), who suggests that there are different, yet equally valid, 'realities':

Just as two different artists will approach the same scene with the same materials yet produce different pictures, the same might be said about two researchers approaching the same scene with the same methodological tools. Neither can be judged right or wrong, even though the images they identify may be different.

The thinking that underpins this approach which insists on acknowledging and being alert to the individuality of the researcher in affecting and being affected by the situation, resonates with the account given in Chapter 3 of reader response theories which have challenged traditional literary thinking and instruction by recognising the significant and active role of the reader. For some, the value of the approach advocated by Denzin and like-minded researchers is that it extends, complicates and challenges understanding, sensitising policy makers and practitioners to the complex dimensions of their work. Such expectations can support a view that it can be legitimate for the researcher not to try to generalise (e.g. from studies of individuals or cases); it is expected that the reader will – and should – make his or her own generalisations. It is important to note, however, that although individual researchers and readers may arrive at different interpretations, this is a different point to the postmodern claim that there might be no principled way of deciding between interpretations that different people provide of a scene.

### *Validity and generalisability*

Some qualitative researchers, in an attempt to respond to criticisms concerning a perceived lack of rigour and difficulties in ensuring validity and reliability, have

argued for more standardisation of research methods and approaches within and across disciplines; others have argued against the notion of standardisation and have sought to develop more innovative and refreshing approaches. Mishler (1990) discusses the notion of validation and offers a different perspective on assessing validity which views 'validation as the social construction of knowledge'. A common objection to qualitative research has been that the findings cannot be tested but have to be taken on trust. For Mishler, the key issue has become the extent to which the 'relevant community of scientists evaluates reported findings as sufficiently trustworthy to rely on them in their own work'. In evaluating a study he suggests that the reader should ask questions about the warrants for any claims made; about the extent to which other researchers could make reasonable judgements about their adequacy; and about the methodology used to collect data, the interpretations made and the trustworthiness of both. In relation to the specific studies he cites as exemplars of good practice, Mishler concludes:

These questions have affirmative answers. The primary reason is the visibility of the work; of the data in the form of the texts used in the analysis, with full transcriptions and tapes that can be made available to other researchers; of the methods that transformed the texts into findings; and of the direct linkages shown between data findings and interpretation.

(Mishler, 1990:429)

While there is certainly much to commend Mishler's approach – the visibility of the data; the opportunity for other researchers to evaluate the research and its findings; the shift towards validation as a social rather than an individual act which aligns it more closely with postmodern approaches to research and to reader response theories – it is important to bear in mind the potential difficulties inherent within such an approach. For example, how could the sheer volume of data gathered within a qualitative research study readily be made available to other researchers? How could the research report contain enough detail and information to be deemed to fulfil the demands of the criterion of 'visibility' while at the same time ensuring that its clarity and focus are not

impaired? Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) conclude that issues of reliability and validity may depend largely on the skills of the researcher and ask 'How valid and reliable is the *person* likely to be as an information gathering instrument?' In addition, the quality of the relationship established between interviewer and interviewee, which is frequently evident in the 'feel' of an interview and the atmosphere created, is not readily captured on audio tapes or in transcriptions; and, as we have seen in Chapter 2 of the literature review, every nuance of non-verbal communication contributes both to the meaning and the success of any communication, so the challenge would be to find some way of conveying this to other researchers. This is of particular importance in the case of children, who undoubtedly behave differently towards different people. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee therefore may not easily be recognised or appreciated; nor may it be possible for another researcher to reconstruct this personal relationship. As Griffiths (1985) points out, circumstances in education are rarely replicable.

Notwithstanding these concerns, Mishler's perspective on validation and visibility is particularly relevant within the present study, since the very act of making data available to other researchers in the field acknowledges that they may concur with my analysis of findings, or they may disagree with it and offer alternative, yet equally valid, interpretations and create different meanings. Such an approach is particularly apposite since it reflects the thinking of the reader response theorists and the postmodern researchers discussed earlier in this chapter. In an attempt to make the data from the present study visible to the reader, a very detailed and explicit account is offered in the sections which follow of all stages and processes in the research. Extensive use is also made of interview extracts in Chapters 5 and 6 which report on findings.

Within the present study there were clearly sound reasons for being heedful of the dangers of generalising and being cautious about generating theoretical concepts during the analysis stage of the project. The sampling strategies



adopted for both the teacher and the pupil informants, which are outlined and justified in the sections which follow, further alerted me to the fact that caution would have to be exercised in respect of any claims based on extrapolation from the sample to a much wider population. Readers however, as Firestone (1993) reminds us, will make inferences about the significance of a research report for situations and groups that are of interest to them and he suggests that it is not possible to prevent this since that sort of thinking is embedded in the act of reading itself. It is therefore desirable, he suggests, for the researcher to draw the reader's attention to such generalisations as he or she considers secure and/or significant as well as to alert the reader to findings which appear to be significant though not generalisable. Such an approach will be used within this thesis; readers will be directed towards what are deemed to be secure and/or significant generalisations and to findings that are significant but do not seem to be generalisable. Further, they will be prompted to consider the extent to which they recognise the findings reported here to be likely to be similar to those in classrooms they know. It is an additional research task beyond this thesis to explore the extent to which they will be found in classrooms in general. Similarly, theoretical concepts will be generated, but the approach adopted will be mindful of the need to exercise caution.

## **The observations and the interviews**

### *Overall research design*

The present thesis reports on an interview study with teachers and pupils which formed part of a more extensive investigation into listening practices in classrooms. The interviews took place following initial observations of ongoing work of particular classes and of specific lessons designed to develop these pupils' skills in listening.

This wider study, therefore, comprised four parts:

- observation of on-going work of 10 target classes of 11 or 12 year old pupils;
- more focused observation of lessons that were explicitly designed to enhance the listening capacities of pupils;
- focused interviews with the 10 teachers whose classes were observed;
- focused interviews with 40 pupils, 4 drawn from each of the 10 classes.

The target classes observed were either first year (S1) or second year (S2) from the lower years in the secondary school where the English curriculum is shaped by the English Language 5-14 Guidelines (SOEID, 1992). Observations of ongoing work of the S1 classes, and of the actual teaching sessions, took place during the second and third term of the 1999-2000 academic session; the observations of the S2 classes took place in the first term of the 2000-2001 academic session. All interviews, both teacher and pupil, were organised as soon as possible after the teaching sessions had been completed.<sup>1</sup>

The desire to observe 'good practice' was an overriding factor in the decision to observe and interview skilled practitioners; representativeness, as will be discussed in the following sections, was not what determined the final selection. Much of the literature on the pedagogy of oral communication in general, and of listening in particular, focuses on the perceived deficiencies of practitioners and the findings of research studies have been explained in terms of those deficiencies. The intention within the present study was to avoid a 'teacher deficit' model; by observing teachers with similar levels of skill it was possible to avoid the need to make comparisons between teachers and the temptation to attribute differences between them to differences in their abilities as teachers, thereby ensuring that the focus was on processes and pupils rather than teacher performance. Further, the desire to observe good teaching appeared to be worthwhile in its own right.

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<sup>1</sup> One teacher interview took place immediately following her final teaching session. The other nine occurred between three days and eight days after the teaching had been completed. 25% of the pupil interviews took place on the same day of the last teaching session. The rest occurred within six days.

## *Triangulation*

The four-part structure of the wider study, of which the interviews with the teachers and the pupils form the main part, has been outlined in the preceding sub-section. A detailed account of the observation of the teaching sessions, which were recorded and analysed, and of the teacher and pupil interviews, will be offered in the following sections of this chapter. Arksey and Knight (1999) highlight the importance of being explicit about (a) the different methods used to gather data and (b) which set of data has been given added weight and value in the analysis and interpretation. As indicated above, the interviews are central to both the wider study and to this thesis, but it is important to elaborate further on the close relationship between the review of the literature offered in Chapters 2 and 3, the observations within the classrooms and the interviews with teachers and pupils.

While the literature and the teaching plans provided by the teachers informed and shaped the observations and the interviews, the observations in turn served to illuminate further the topics to be explored in the interviews and to highlight other – unexpected – areas for discussion which appeared to offer rich sources of data. The strength of this research methodology was that it made it possible for me during the interviews to elicit responses from informants about what they *knew*, *thought* and *believed* from the position of someone who had been furnished with detailed teaching plans in advance and who then observed what was actually *done*.

This was a key methodological decision, though unsurprisingly such an approach is not without its critics. Denzin (1970) introduced the notion of ‘multiple triangulation’ which is implemented at the level of the overall research design, and suggested four different types that are available to enhance the quality of research enquiries: methodological, data, investigator and theoretical.

The type used within the present study was methodological (between-method) since this was deemed to be most appropriate for the reasons outlined above. More recently, critics have challenged Denzin's argument that triangulation is an appropriate technique to strengthen confidence in research findings (Fielding and Fielding, 1986; Blaikie, 1991), rejecting his view that such strategies do reduce bias and improve validity and arguing that 'a mixed methods study may end up as something of a hotchpotch' with no underlying intellectual rationale to justify the chosen methods (Blaikie, 1991). It has also been suggested that the concept carries too positivist a bias (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) which implies that there is only one true social reality and researchers simply have to decide on the most appropriate methods to describe it. This view stands in opposition to postmodernist thinking that there are different social worlds and it is not the case that one version is right while all others are wrong. Mason (1996) claims that implementing a mixed approach may mean that the results relate to different objects or events rather than different aspects of the same phenomena.

In spite of these criticisms a triangulated study still has potential merits, especially if it is conceived less as a strategy for confirmation and more as one for in-depth understanding and completeness (Arksey and Knight, 1999). The rationale for adopting the approach within the present study was exactly that: the intention was to use different research methods to illuminate the complex nature of the social settings under investigation, to deepen understanding of what was being investigated and create as detailed and complete a picture as possible. The account given in the earlier section demonstrates the ways in which the different parts of the study worked together to generate data which provided a rich and detailed account of the listening work within these classrooms.

## Sampling of teacher and pupil informants

### *Sampling: teacher informants*

The decision to invite ten practising teachers, who were former Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) students training to become secondary teachers of English, (and for whom I had had responsibility during their time in the Faculty of Education), to become involved in the research was a key methodological decision which requires justification. While the sample could not be called representative in the accepted sense, the desire to observe 'good practice', which was discussed earlier, was an overriding factor. These teachers were all known to me. All were judged to be highly competent when measured against the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) competences for the probationer teacher and all achieved a final profile of grades which comprised mainly As<sup>2</sup>. All had qualified within the previous five years and had between two and five years experience. All quickly secured full-time permanent employment on qualifying, and all were held in high regard within the departments and schools where they worked. And, importantly, all had experienced a very similar training within a PGCE course that emphasised the equal importance of each of the four language modes – Listening, Talking, Reading and Writing – within a balanced lower school curriculum. Furthermore, from the potential pool of skilled teachers, account was taken of the kinds of schools within which they were working at the time the research was conducted. As subsequent sections will reveal, while these teachers were consciously selected to be broadly similar in their teaching qualifications and expertise, there was at the same time a conscious decision to choose contrasting schools within which the research would take place.

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<sup>2</sup> Seven areas are reported on: (1) subject and content of teaching; (2) communication; (3) methodology; (4) management; (5) assessment; (6) the school; (7) professionalism. Each is graded on a scale of A-E, with A representing highly competent levels of performance.

There appeared to be a number of advantages in adopting this sampling method. It allowed me to avoid a 'teacher deficit model' by identifying skilled practitioners. Certain assumptions, based on prior knowledge of these teachers and on their current reputations as 'good teachers', could be made about their interest in and knowledge of their subject and in the effective teaching of that subject; about their existing skills; and about their continuing motivation to develop further those skills. Having been closely involved in devising the subject specialist component of the PGCE course, in teaching the course, in supervising students during school placements and in being involved in their assessment, I was well aware of how the teaching of listening was handled and of what these teachers, as trainees, were capable of doing. There was the added benefit that a positive, professional relationship had already been established with these teachers during their training and in my subsequent dealings with them as practising teachers. Although the nature of that relationship would inevitably change during this research, with tactful handling I believed that mutual trust and professional respect would continue to develop.

There were, of course, a number of possible disadvantages. It is likely that a more representative sample would have provided a wider variation in teacher knowledge and beliefs. Because each teacher had been identified as a skilled practitioner, it was reasonable to surmise that the quality of their teaching would be consistently good, which would not necessarily have been the case had the sample been drawn at random from the wider population. I remained alert, however, to instances where their teaching was not going well, and thus sought to avoid the dangers associated with the 'halo' effect. It also had to be recognised that, because my initial relationship with them had been on a tutor/student basis, when I had been involved in assessing their teaching and grading them, some of the teachers may have experienced unease until it was clearly established that our relationship was on a different footing entirely. Nevertheless, on balance, it was considered that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages in adopting this sampling method.



The teacher sample comprised ten teachers, nine females and one male. While it would have been preferable to have had a more equal gender balance, this proved difficult to arrange for a number of reasons, the most significant of which was the fact that there are considerably more female teachers of English in Scotland than there are males. The balance within the sample therefore reflects the overall ratio within Scottish secondary schools.

### *Sampling: contrasting school settings*

It has been noted in preceding sections of this chapter that a conscious decision was made to observe and interview teachers who worked in very different types of schools. This is a significant decision in relation to sampling and also to the analysis of the findings of the study. In total, six different schools were involved; two teachers were drawn from each of the first four schools and one each from the other two. The schools in which these teachers were employed served communities from significantly different socio-economic backgrounds. Three were from the independent sector (i.e. private fee-paying schools), two of which were single sex schools (one male and one female) and the third a mixed sex school. Three were mixed sex comprehensive schools, with two serving areas of recognised social and economic deprivation (one urban and one rural school) and the third was a comprehensive school serving a fairly affluent rural suburb.

### *Procedures*

Each of the ten teachers was contacted initially by telephone. A general account of the nature and purpose of the research was given and invitations to participate were extended. All agreed in principle, and letters were then sent to the local authorities within which the schools were situated and to the Head Teachers of the individual schools outlining the research project and seeking

written permission to proceed. Permission was granted in each case, though two Head Teachers requested further information, which was immediately provided. A detailed letter was then sent to the teachers providing considerably more detail about the scope of and the proposed timescale for the project and asking them to (a) identify a lower school class to be observed (i.e. S1 or S2), (b) indicate on the schedule provided the most suitable times for the observations to occur, (c) provide detailed lesson plans in advance of the lessons to be observed and (d) identify two pupils they deemed to be 'good' listeners and two 'less successful' listeners. No guidance was offered concerning the basis on which such decisions should be made, since this was an area to be explored in some depth within the teacher interviews.

*Sampling: pupil informants*

The pupil informants, although they had been identified by the teacher in advance, were not invited to participate in an interview until after the observations had taken place. It was important during the teaching phase that they did not feel that particular attention was being paid to them, since it was likely that this would make them uncomfortable and therefore affect both their behaviour and performance. Following the observation phase the four pupils in each class readily agreed to be interviewed once the purpose and the conduct of the interview had been carefully explained. Two further letters were then prepared, one for the pupils to sign and one for their parents or guardian to sign agreeing to their participation. This sampling method, which was an important methodological decision, will be discussed further in the section on ethical considerations. The following table provides details of the teachers, schools and pupils involved.

**Table 4:1: Teachers, schools and pupils involved**

Teacher	School	Sex	School type	Experience	Position	Class
1	2	F	Independent single sex (M)	3 yrs	Class teacher	S2 Class set by ability
2	6	M	Rural comprehensive	2 yrs	Class teacher	S2 Mixed ability
3	5	F	Rural comprehensive	4 yrs	Class teacher	S2 Mixed ability
4	4	F	Urban comprehensive	4 yrs	Class teacher	S1 Mixed ability
5	1	F	Independent mixed sex	3 yrs	Class teacher	S2 Class set by ability
6	5	F	Rural comprehensive	5 yrs	Class teacher	S2 Mixed ability
7	6	F	Rural comprehensive	2 yrs	Class teacher	S1 Mixed ability
8	2	F	Independent single sex (M)	3 yrs	Class teacher	S1 Class set by ability
9	4	F	Urban comprehensive	5 yrs	Class teacher	S2 Mixed ability
10	3	F	Independent single sex (F)	5 yrs	Class teacher	S2 Class set by ability

Table 4:2 provides details of the pupil sample, selected by the teachers, in terms of gender and perceived listening ability.

**Table 4:2: Gender balance between good and less successful listeners**

Gender	Good listener	Less successful listener	Total
Female	13	7	20
Male	7	13	20
Total	20	20	40

Staying true to the earlier stated commitment to make the processes of the study as visible as possible, it is necessary to highlight an aspect of the pupil sampling that did not prove to be as straightforward as anticipated. The decision to sample pupils by teacher nomination of two 'good' and two 'less successful' listeners revealed some interesting findings. Teachers were given no guidance about how decisions should be made, and the criteria they selected for choosing pupils were subsequently explored during the interviews. Table 4:2 demonstrates that one important consequence of this sampling method was that there was not an equal balance between male and female participants in terms of their perceived listening competence. Because of this it was not appropriate, at the analysis stages of the study, to explore the relationship between perceived and actual levels of performance and gender.<sup>3</sup>

Most teachers acknowledged that they had made fundamental errors when identifying 'good' and 'less successful' listeners, and several recognised that decisions had been based on fairly spurious evidence concerning the pupils' actual ability to listen. Pupil behaviour, attentiveness, evidence of engagement with tasks, and teachers' impressions featured in several accounts, as well as formative and summative assessment of listening ability. Interestingly, a fair number of pupils identified as 'less successful' listeners performed particularly well on the tasks set, and in several instances even better than the 'good' listeners. While it is certainly possible that inaccurate initial evaluations of their ability had been made by the teachers, it may also be the case that some pupils increased their own efforts because of their involvement in the research and their desire to 'do well' because they had agreed to be observed and interviewed.

The preceding two paragraphs have considered several of the difficulties associated with the decision to allow the teachers to select the pupil sample.

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<sup>3</sup> There also exists a body of literature which points to the possibility of gender bias operating in the teacher selection of 'good' listeners and 'less successful' listeners. Female teachers may recognise 'good' girl listeners more readily than 'good' boy listeners which may be another reason for their inaccurate judgements. However, this was not explored in the current research.

The limitations – and the strengths – of this sampling method will be explored further in the Discussion in Chapter 7.

### **Ethical issues: informed consent and confidentiality**

Lewis and Lindsay (2000) remind us that the methods of research used with adults, and particularly with children, need very careful consideration. While the choice of methods will be determined by the research question(s), it is essential that age, social class, gender and ethnicity of child informants and any other key variables are considered in an explicit way when designing the research study. The sections which follow will describe the different ways in which these variables were considered during the interviews, but first of all key ethical considerations will be discussed.

An important concept within research is the notion of informed consent, and any researcher must recognise that he or she has extra responsibilities when it comes to children. Consent *must* be given and it must be *informed*. Stanley et al (1995) reviewed the literature on consent and they concluded that the general trend, even when informants are adults, is for studies to demonstrate that informants' comprehension of research studies is consistently poor. However, they argue that the competence of minors to consent to research is probably underestimated. Factors to consider in ensuring that the child is informed include age, general cognitive ability, emotional status and knowledge. Vulnerability, they suggest, must be considered in a broader way than age alone, with the responsibility on the researcher to err on the side of caution.

While the teacher informants were confident that they had enough information to allow them to give their informed consent, considerable care was taken to ensure that pupil informants were similarly confident and that they fully understood the short term and the longer term implications of their

involvement. Furthermore, the class teachers, who knew these pupils well, provided reassurances that although there were significant variations in pupils' cognitive ability, this in itself would not prevent them from understanding what they were agreeing to. The teachers were asked to avoid selecting children who, for any reason at all, could be deemed in any way vulnerable and to involve only those whom they felt were secure within their classrooms.

The decision to ask teachers to identify 'good' and 'less successful' listeners in advance of the observations was taken on methodological grounds, namely that I intended to (a) determine whether I agreed with their judgements on the basis of pupil participation and performance, (b) explore with the teachers in their interviews the criteria used to make their selections and the extent to which they were subsequently deemed accurate, and (c) to ask the pupils how they viewed themselves as listeners and how they thought they had performed during the lessons. In the event, this yielded particularly interesting – and in the case of the teachers, unexpected – data.

The notion of confidentiality has a very particular meaning among researchers and this was discussed with all informants, who were assured that considerable care would be taken to ensure that no information would be passed on to those connected in any way with them. Information would be disclosed only in ways that protected their identity, schools where the research took place would not be identified and any facts or information, which might otherwise identify them, would be changed or omitted. Pupil informants were further assured that what they said would not be passed on to either teachers or their parents. Hamilton and Hopegood (1997) advise that when consent is sought from parents it should be on the understanding that what the child says will remain confidential and that children should see the letters which are sent to parents – advice which was adopted within this study.



## The observation studies

A rationale for the integration of the observational studies within the overall research design has been offered earlier and, although it does not lie within the scope of the present thesis to offer a detailed description and analysis of the observational data gathered, it is necessary to outline the purpose and conduct of these observations and to indicate the ways in which they informed the subsequent teacher and pupil interviews. The work of observation was guided by the following central questions: what 'listening' occurred in these classrooms?; what demands for listening were placed upon pupils and which purposes were they meant to achieve within particular communication contexts?; and to what extent were pupils' listening activities scaffolded?

It was negotiated with each of the ten teachers that I would initially spend some time in their classrooms to allow me to get a general 'feel' for the class and to begin to build up a picture of the listening that occurred within the social context of individual classrooms. It was also important that pupils were given the opportunity to become used to my presence and, since I did not participate or intervene in any way during their lessons, to understand that my role was that of a non-participant observer. Between three and six hours were spent with each class during these initial observation sessions.

As requested, each teacher had provided me with detailed lesson plans for a minimum of three linked lessons that focused on the development of pupils' existing skills in listening and/or the teaching of new skills. These lesson plans contained information under the following headings: pupil context (i.e. details of pupils' abilities; specific learning difficulties; prior learning; behaviour; motivational levels etc.); aims for lessons; learning objectives; approaches to differentiation; resources; teaching methodology; purpose and method of assessment and assessment criteria; and details of how planning, implementation and assessment would be evaluated. One teacher planned for

three lessons, each of one hour's duration, while the others planned between four and six lessons. Because of the different lengths of periods in different schools, classes lasted between forty minutes and one hour ten minutes. Teachers were asked to judge when they felt that I had become an accepted and familiar enough presence within their classrooms for this very focused stage of the observational work to begin. The lessons were tape-recorded. To minimise the 'excitement factor' introduced when the radio microphones were used, several 'trial runs' were organised during earlier lessons.

While it was inevitable that my presence would have some effect on the dynamics within these classrooms, every effort was made to minimise that effect. It was decided, in prior discussions with the teachers, that they would simply inform the children that I was very interested to see the work that they were doing in English, particularly work that involved them in listening, that I would be observing some of their classes and that I would like to interview a few of them. This was done before I arrived. Several pupils asked questions but most simply accepted their teacher's explanation. Thereafter, I remained as unobtrusive as possible, though I attempted to project a warm, interested persona and, for example, laughed along with everyone else at the frequent humorous comments and events that occur within any classroom. Insofar as I was able to gauge their feelings, the pupils appeared to accept me fairly readily and, on the whole, the impressions of the teachers were that the work of their classes proceeded as they would have expected it to. Unsurprisingly, a few of the teachers acknowledged some degree of initial nervousness and apprehension, but reported that they quickly settled into their normal teaching rhythms and realised that their relationship with me was on an equal and professional footing.

## **Relationship between observations and interview study**

The observations were valuable for a number of reasons. Key topics and themes to be covered in the interviews with teacher and pupil informants had emerged from the literature review, yet it became clear from the observations that others should be included. Having observed teaching sessions, I was also in the position during both sets of interviews to explore not only informants' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions, but also what they actually did. Arksey and Knight (1999) discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of using insights gained from observational studies to analyse and report on interviews with informants who were the focus of such studies. Some of the advantages have been discussed in previous paragraphs. One disadvantage may be that the researcher and the informant have access to contextual information that may be difficult to convey to the reader of the report. This may be of particular importance, they suggest, to those researchers who have abandoned the detached researcher status and become participant researchers. The researcher, they conclude, must inevitably walk a fine line between providing just enough detail to allow the reader to determine whether interpretations are warranted, while ensuring that such detail does not serve to obscure the clarity and focus of the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Turning now to the interviews with pupils and teachers, an account will be given of the general approach adopted within the interviews, the conduct and content of both sets of interviews and the particular issues to be addressed when interviewing children.

### **The interview process**

Having reviewed the literature on interviewing, and in light of the transactional model of communication and the construction of knowledge outlined in

Chapter 2, it became apparent that within both pupil and teacher interviews the most appropriate and fruitful approach to adopt would be one which, as far as possible, matched the description offered by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) of the 'active interview'. Holstein and Gubrium reject the view that 'crisp answers to clean questions can be recovered with professional dispatch once the ground rules are explained by the interviewer to the informant' and argue that interviews are, in fact, 'social productions' which are inherently active, collaborative and problematic. Viewed from this perspective, interviews are interpretively active, reality-constructing occasions whereby both interviewer and interviewees are actively involved in a dynamic process of making meaning. With the interviewer's help, the informant activates different aspects of what Holstein and Gubrium term his or her 'store of knowledge' or 'narrative production' which can be heard in the conversational give and take of the interview.

The case for a more interactive style of interviewing has been made by a number of researchers, including Miller and Cannell (1988), who discuss the commonly-held belief among researchers that in order to obtain valid information the interviewer must gain the trust of the informant, and suggest that while much lip-service is paid to the concept of 'rapport' it is not entirely clear what is meant. Manifestations of rapport-seeking interviewer behaviour, however, can be identified. Using a clinical approach to interviewing, the interviewer seeks to establish rapport and adopts a friendly, empathic attitude; he or she is non-directive, giving the informant no cues about 'correct' answers and certainly does not express his or her own opinions. A combination of the non-directive approach and a friendly attitude is supposed to decrease response error by relieving the informant of the pressure to maintain a totally positive self-presentation and by motivating the informant to reveal him or herself accurately.

Miller and Cannell, however, argue that the neutral or non-directive interviewer style frequently does not motivate or inform informants. An interview is a rare experience for most people and they need guidance to appropriate response behaviour. Cues to the informant for deciding when an adequate response has been given are obscure and they are likely to remain so if the interviewer conforms to the simple rules of being non-directive and friendly. Citing an extensive study undertaken in 1968 by Cannell et al in support of their argument, they conclude that many informants frequently understand neither the goals of an interview nor what they are supposed to do with a particular question. Apparently 'rapport' itself is not sufficient for achieving good interview communication:

A newer model of the interview has been developed which stresses teaching informants to perform response tasks adequately and motivating them to undertake the effort to answer accurately .... While these approaches do not deny the importance of gaining the informant's co-operation on an affective level, they place more emphasis on 'taking care of business' in the interview.

(Miller and Cannell, 1988:74)

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:159), who also advocate a far more active style, stress the importance of the interpersonal aspects of interviewing:

A qualitative researcher points towards the importance of the establishment of rapport, empathy and understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee.

They cite an often-quoted passage from Lofland (1971:90):

I would say that successful interviewing is not unlike carrying on an unthreatening, self-controlled, supportive, polite and cordial interaction in every-day life. If one can do that, one already has the main interpersonal skills necessary to interviewing... It is my personal impression, however, that interactants who practise these skills (even if they possess them) are not overly numerous in our society.

Throughout both sets of focused interviews every effort was made to ensure that informants were asked questions in such a way as to 'activate narrative production' while at the same time to remain alert to the importance of bearing in mind the research task. For example, informants were helped to make connections, to conceptualise, to elaborate further and to move in different directions within the scope and parameters of the research topic without dictating or implicitly suggesting how their responses might be framed.

Relevant topics and themes to be pursued in the interviews were selected beforehand and an interview guide was produced which contained key questions. The less formal semi-structured approach to interviewing that was adopted allowed me to ask follow-up questions and explore meanings and areas of interest that emerged as the interviews progressed. It also allowed scope for the informants to introduce topics which they viewed as relevant and was flexible in that informants could choose to discuss topics from different perspectives than those planned in advance. The main aim, therefore, was to hear what the informants had to say; to allow scope to improvise questions to clarify or extend answers; and to encourage informants to highlight particular areas of interest and to introduce new topics.

Care was taken throughout to ensure that my 'reading' and understanding of participant statements were accurate. For example, such responses as "can I just ask you to say that again to make sure I'm understanding you ...", or "can I just check that I'm getting this right ..." allowed me constantly to check out my emerging interpretations of what was being said by both pupil and teacher respondents. In this way issues associated with validity and moral obligations were also considered; I made every effort throughout the interviews to check my own understanding and I ensured that respondents were given opportunities to reword, rephrase, paraphrase etc. to make sure they were confident that they had said what they intended to say.



In addition, interpretations were checked out with teacher participants as themes emerged and, although such conversations were perhaps too loosely structured to merit use of the term 'respondent validation' (which would suggest a more detailed, systematic process) they nevertheless provided invaluable opportunities to confirm the validity of such interpretations.

### *The pupil interviews: general issues*

There are additional issues to be considered when interviewing children. The importance of taking account of key variables such as age, social class, gender and ethnicity was highlighted earlier in the section on ethical issues, and the need to consider pupils' general cognitive ability, their emotional status, their knowledge and their potential vulnerability was recognised.

Siegal (1997) discusses the challenges that researchers face when working with children and argues that anyone who knows and works with young people recognises that they have understandings which are often not reflected in what they *say* and *do*. Adults attempt to draw their knowledge out, but this may not be easy. It remains common to attribute their difficulties in answering questions to a basic limitation in their stage of intellectual or cognitive development. Lindsay and Lewis (2000) caution that a child's performance – in observational, test and interview situations – is not always an accurate indication of his or her competence which may lead to incorrect conclusions being drawn.

Siegal (1997) suggests that their less successful performance can frequently be explained in terms of a clash between the conversational worlds of children and adults:

Children may not share the assumption that the purpose of an interview is to establish their understanding of concepts. They may perceive adults' questions to be ambiguous, irrelevant,

insincere or uninformative. The interviewer may unjustifiably assume that children will share the use of certain words that are prerequisites for understanding questions. Unlike adults who are more experienced and who can recognise the implications that flow from different forms of questioning, children are liable to misinterpret the interviewer's purpose or use of language. Thus, they may respond incorrectly, not because they lack knowledge but because conversational worlds of adults and children diverge.

(Siegal, 1997:12)

Interviews often involve prolonged forms of unconventional questioning methods where children can perceive that the conversational rules have been broken. Any comprehensive study of children's abilities, he argues, must take into account their interpretation of conversational rules to ensure that their lack of success on tasks that involve knowledge of abstract concepts cannot be attributed to infringement of these rules. He concludes that 'as a guiding model, child development is better characterised by development towards the conscious accessibility of implicit knowledge rather than a simple lack of conceptual ability or coherence' (Siegal, 1997:13).

This theoretical model, which encourages a shift in the focus of attention towards gaining access to children's implicit knowledge and their developing metacognitive awareness, is helpful in light of the discussion in Chapter 3 which focuses on metacognition and higher order functions characterised by conscious awareness and volition. It has been noted that there is a lack of literature on metacognition in listening, though it was clear from the observational studies that many of the pupils were using metacognitive strategies. The challenge in the interviews, therefore, was to determine (a) whether they were aware of this and if they had made conscious decisions to adopt such strategies, (b) if they could make their implicit understandings explicit, (c) if they had control of the metalanguage required for such a discussion, and (d) if I could be alert and sensitive enough in the interviews to help the pupils to articulate their knowledge and understandings.

Throughout the interviews with pupils every effort was made to minimise and overcome the obstacles that could emerge as a result of a clash between our conversational worlds. I spoke to pupils in an explicit manner which did not set aside the four key Gricean maxims which create a 'logic in conversation': quantity, quality, relevance and manner (Grice, 1975). I remained alert to the need to ensure that the questions were as clear and unambiguous as possible and, following incorrect or inappropriate responses, I frequently attributed the failure of the communication to my own lack of success in wording of the question (e.g. "I'm sorry, I haven't worded that question well. Let me try it again"). Answers which revealed a lack of understanding of the question also prompted rewording or rephrasing in an attempt to come at the question from a different perspective. At times pupils misinterpreted the 'why' questions as a signal to change their answers and offered responses aimed to meet what they perceived to be my needs as an interviewer. In such instances I returned to their initial responses, expressed genuine interest in them, and encouraged pupils to offer further elaboration.

The observational study proved invaluable because I had observed what these pupils were in practice able to *do*. For example, having observed pupils who worked confidently (and successfully) during the lessons on listening, and who subsequently had difficulties responding to questions during the interview, I was conscious of the fact that while they clearly *possessed* implicit understandings they had problems expressing such understandings *explicitly*. The observations therefore provided a shared context and I was able to use examples from the lessons to guide some pupils towards articulating their knowledge and understanding.

It also became clear that some of the pupils did not have a secure enough grasp of the metalanguage required to discuss fairly difficult, abstract concepts without contextual information. For example, the teachers responded readily to questions about the cognitive processes involved in listening and, although the

wording of the question was much simpler for pupils, many were unable to respond. When the question was reworded and contextualised within the observed lessons and their own likely experience, many identified the mental processes of attention, concentration, memory and motivation.

The adult interviewer must also be alert to the power relationship that exists between adults and children. He or she must bear in mind that with a more limited experience of the social world and personalities of adults, children may appear highly suggestible. Children recognise that adults ordinarily have more knowledge than they do and this recognition, as Freeman, Sinha and Condliffe (1981) point out, adds to the imbalance of power that is implicit within conversations between adults and children. The more unbalanced the power relationship, they suggest, the less willing children are to answer questions. France, Bendelow and Williams (2000) suggest that the age gap between the adult interviewer and the child informant is a key factor and that it is important to think about how to 'bridge the gap'. The interviewer must establish a relationship of trust and attempt to be someone who is interesting to be around. Butler and Williamson (1994:43), however, caution that the identity the interviewer creates must not be an attempt to 'go native':

Age inevitably, unavoidably, creates its barriers and no child or young person wants to talk to an adult who is patently projecting too youthful an image or persona or self-consciously letting fly with contemporary street *argot*.

They propose that four key factors need to be considered if bridges are to be built effectively. First, the interviewer must engage with young people in a role of 'naïve curiosity' which is open, honest and empathetic, and never condescending or patronising. Second, judgmental attitudes about their behaviours and beliefs should be avoided. Third, the interviewer should have an opportunity to nurture their curiosity and provide opportunities for them to present their own views and explore the complexity of issues under

examination. Fourth, the interviewer must be creative and flexible. In my interviews I sought to follow these four precepts.

*The pupil interviews: content*

The pupil interviews were designed to allow very specific questions to be posed concerning the lessons that had been observed and to explore pupils’ general knowledge and beliefs about listening, often by inviting them to reflect on particular episodes. The following table outlines the main topics explored in these interviews.

**Table 4:3: Topics explored in pupil interviews**

Topics explored in pupil interviews
Central matters discussed with the 40 pupils included:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• gathering pupil accounts of the lessons observed: awareness of what they were to learn; different methods, self evaluation</li><li>• perceptions of the place of listening within their everyday work in English classrooms</li><li>• perceptions of how different genres of texts, different listening purposes and contexts impact on their listening</li><li>• listening and watching</li><li>• factors which facilitate/prevent effective listening</li><li>• awareness of the listening process</li><li>• perceptions of themselves as listeners</li><li>• perceptions of ‘good’ and ‘poor’ listening behaviours</li><li>• views on how they could improve their listening</li><li>• value of listening within English lessons, in other curricular areas and outwith school.</li></ul>

### *Aspects of the process of pupil interviews*

The interviews with pupils lasted between twenty-five and sixty minutes, (though I terminated an interview early with one informant who was clearly upset as the result of an incident in an earlier class). The teachers had managed to organise a room in each school for the interviews, which meant that there were no interruptions. I indicated at the beginning that I was well aware of their commitments immediately following the interviews, and reassured informants that I would not go beyond the time designated.

The pupils were reassured once again at the beginning of the interview that confidentiality would be respected and that their identity would be protected in any reporting of the findings. I reminded them of the purpose of the interview and thanked them for agreeing to participate. I made it clear that if they did not understand a particular question they should simply tell me and I would try to rephrase it for them. In addition, informants were informed that if they did not wish to answer a particular question they should simply tell me and I would move on. I also told them that they should feel free to introduce any topics they felt were relevant or important, and that I would be happy for them to indicate that they would like to explore any topic further, or indeed from a different perspective. It was important that I conveyed to them my desire that this should be a genuine interaction, within which we explored ideas together and attempted to arrive at shared understandings, rather than a simple question/answer session. Questions from them seeking further information or clarification were invited and answered. I then sought the informants' permission to tape record the interview, and this was readily given in all cases.

Each interview began with a very general question about their work in English over the year that involved them in any way in listening. Although it was important to get a sense of their perceptions of the day-to-day listening work that occurred in their classrooms, this was deliberately a very open-ended



question designed to get pupils talking. General follow-up questions encouraged further elaboration in many cases, though with a few respondents it was necessary to ask very specific questions and to provide examples before they began to appreciate what I was asking them. Thereafter, informants were asked a group of questions that elicited information about their awareness of the different genres of texts they listened to; which genres of texts they encountered least often/most often; which genres they found easiest/hardest to listen to and why they believed this to be the case; if, and in what ways, the genre of the text affected and influenced *how* they listened; and the extent to which they believed they made conscious decisions about how to listen to different genres of texts.

In Chapter 3 the positions of the different genre theorists were discussed and, though there were clearly a number of different interpretations of the term, there was broad agreement that when readers recognise, and are familiar with, the specific structural forms and linguistic markers of different genres, and when children are made aware of these markers, there are significant benefits not only to their reading but to their writing as well. When the reader can recognise what genre of a text it is, he or she then knows what to expect from that text and how to read it. Even in those cases where the genre boundaries have been blurred, or there has been a significant and deliberate subversion of the form, readers can consider the purposes and effects of such blurring or subversion when they know and are familiar with the conventional structures and linguistic markers. These interview questions were therefore designed to explore whether pupils believed they listened to different genres of texts in different ways; and if how they listened was automatic and unconscious, or determined by deliberate and conscious decisions. The wording adopted for this question was 'type of text'. The term 'genre' was not used unless the pupils themselves introduced it. In this way, it was possible to avoid offering a metalanguage which they would not have otherwise employed. The strategies they adopted when they did not understand a text or when meaning broke

down enabled me to seek information about their metacognitive awareness and behaviours when listening.

In addition, informants were asked about different contexts for listening that they experienced within the day-to-day work of their English classroom, and about the ways in which such contexts impacted on and influenced their listening behaviours. For example, contexts such as listening within a whole class discussion, listening within small group discussions, listening to the teacher giving instructions, explaining and teaching, and listening to audio and video tapes in the classroom were explored. Within this exploration of context, when the opportunity arose, the notion of 'listening to oneself', to our 'inner voice' was discussed. This led to a series of questions about whether their listening was influenced by context, and whether they found intrapersonal or interpersonal easier or preferable, which in turn led to questions about listening within group discussions. Their perceptions of appropriate behaviours within group discussions were explored, and informants were asked to explain how they knew someone was actually listening to them within a group. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 highlighted the transactional nature of communication and discussed the view that some theorists hold that the transaction remains incomplete until there is an explicit response. The purpose of these questions was to ascertain whether these informants believed that context has a significant impact on listening behaviour and, as with the questions on genre, to gauge the extent to which they were able to articulate their views.

The next set of questions explored the importance of having a clear purpose for listening, and whether having an explicit purpose aided effective listening. Informants were then asked to consider the ways in which their listening was affected, both by having a purpose for listening and when no clear purpose was offered. Whether listening was affected when there was also a visual stimulus was discussed and views on this were invited.

The next section of the interview shifted the focus to the actual lessons observed and informants were asked to explain what they thought their teacher wanted them to learn about listening in general and about themselves as listeners in particular from those lessons. The teaching methods were explored and informants were asked to comment on and evaluate their own performance and achievements within these lessons. Questions were then asked to determine the extent to which these pupils could provide an account of the cognitive processes involved in listening. This was of particular significance. From the observations of the lessons, and from the subsequent interviews, it had become clear that many of these pupils clearly possessed implicit understandings of the mental processes involved in listening.

The final section of the interview moved on to more general questions and informants were invited to explain what they thought a 'good' listener was; to describe a time when they felt they had listened really well and what factors had contributed to this success; to explain what facilitates good listening and, conversely, what prevents it; to reflect on the value of good listening skills within other areas of the school curriculum and outwith school; to consider what they could do to improve their own listening and to think about what their teachers could do to help them to improve. The actual sequence in which these questions were asked varied depending on the individual pupil, and in some instances they were asked towards the beginning of the interview when a pupil was finding it difficult to relax into the interview. At the conclusion of each interview I thanked the informant again and asked whether he or she had any questions they would like to ask me.

### *The teacher interviews: general issues*

It is not my intention to repeat the many relevant points made in earlier sections about interviewing in general, and much of what was said in relation to the interviewing of children is equally salient here. It has been noted in the literature on interviewing that for most of us this is not a frequent or common form of interaction, and that skills develop with practice. This was certainly the case with me, particularly during the pupil interviews. While I certainly enjoyed interacting with the pupils, I felt throughout that it was my responsibility to keep the interview going and I worked very hard to help them articulate their thoughts and opinions and to stay focused.

The teacher interviews were certainly less demanding. Although I still had the same sense of overall responsibility, a similar professional background and a shared interest in language and in the teaching of language meant that these teachers understood not only the majority of the questions but they also could recognise the implications that flowed from different forms of questioning. Because of this the teacher informants required considerably less prompting and most of them had a confident control of the metalanguage required to offer extended, detailed responses.

Arksey and Knight (1999) discuss the potential problems inherent in undertaking research with peers, and express the view that in such circumstances it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain an objective and detached stance. This is certainly an important point and one that requires consideration. Within the present study, however, these teachers were not in the accepted sense 'peers'. Although I was employed for many years as a teacher of English in secondary schools, and I am therefore well aware of the demands placed upon teachers, I have now worked within teacher education in higher education for nearly ten years. I view this professional background as a distinct advantage. I shared a common experience with these teachers, who



therefore accepted me as a knowledgeable former teacher; but, having moved from classroom teaching into teacher education, I have established some degree of distance from the day-to-day classroom teaching in schools and therefore am able to be objective. My main concern, as previously noted, was that my previous relationship with these teachers had been on a tutor/student teacher basis and I was alert to the need to quickly establish a more equal relationship. I believe that I achieved this with most of the teacher informants. I aimed to approach the observations and the interviews in a genuine and open manner and certainly did not present myself as an 'expert' in any way. In the event, the teachers indicated that they had quickly felt relaxed and comfortable with my presence in their classrooms and during the interviews.

### *The teacher interviews: content*

The interviews with the teachers were designed to operate on two distinct levels: to allow very specific questions to be posed concerning the lessons that had been observed and to explore teachers' general knowledge and beliefs about listening by inviting them to reflect on particular aspects of listening within classrooms.

The interviews with teacher informants lasted between one hour and one hour forty minutes. Apart from one, they took place outwith the normal school day. I expected each interview to last approximately one hour, though I asked each teacher to indicate what time he or she had available and gave assurances that we would finish timeously. Exactly the same reassurances concerning confidentiality were given to the teacher informants as had been given to pupil informants. Teachers were also invited to become fully and actively engaged in the interaction; to introduce new topics; to explore topics from different perspectives; to indicate when they did not understand a question; and to choose not to answer a particular question. I also sought permission to tape the interviews.

Table 4:4 lists the topics which were explored and it is clear that there was a fair degree of overlap between teacher and pupil interviews. For example, the initial questions were designed to get teachers to think about the place of listening within their day-to-day teaching, and they were then asked to consider how different text genres, contexts and purposes for listening impact on their pupils' listening. Listening and watching, and the concurrent processing of aural and visual information was explored, as was listening within school contexts outwith English. Teachers were also asked to share their understanding of the cognitive processes involved in listening.

Table 4:4: Topics explored in teacher interviews

Topics explored in teacher interviews
Central matters discussed with the 10 teachers included:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>the lessons observed: learning objectives; differentiation; methodology; assessment; evaluation</li><li>perceptions of the place of listening within their everyday teaching</li><li>reactions to curricular guidelines in relation to listening</li><li>planning of listening activities and any difficulties encountered at the planning stage</li><li>perceptions of how different genres of texts, different listening purposes and contexts impact on children's listening</li><li>listening and watching</li><li>listening in school contexts outwith the English classroom</li><li>accounts of the processes involved in listening</li><li>criteria for identifying 'good' and 'less successful' listeners</li><li>thoughts on how pupils could improve their listening</li><li>teachers' reflections on their own professional development needs in relation to listening.</li></ul>



Teacher informants were asked to focus on the lessons they had taught, and I had copies of their plans in case they had forgotten their own copies. Questions about the learning objectives were posed and informants were asked to (a) elaborate further on exactly what they wanted pupils to learn from their lessons, and (b) with the benefit of hindsight, determine whether they considered these objectives to be appropriate. An important set of questions then followed about how they had differentiated to take account of pupils' existing abilities and knowledge. The teachers were all aware that to plan for effective progression in learning they must first of all know exactly what these children were able to do; what I was trying to get at here was to determine the ways in which they had diagnostically assessed pupils to ensure that their teaching was building on and extending further pupils' existing knowledge and skills. Similarly, they were asked to explain and justify their chosen teaching methods and to discuss the approaches to pupil assessment that had been adopted. The final questions in this section invited an evaluation of planning, implementation and assessment arrangements.

Having the teaching plans available in advance, and having observed the teaching of these lessons, I was able to ask many additional questions in this section of the interview and I was able to draw on examples to contextualise and clarify questions. In addition, I had also kept a detailed written running record during the teaching sessions and had noted in the margins particular episodes in the teaching that I should listen to again before the interview. This proved invaluable, in that it reminded me of exactly what had been said by the pupils and by the teacher, and I could therefore remind the teachers and ask specific questions. Every effort was made to arrange these interviews as soon as possible after the actual teaching sessions to ensure that details remained fresh, both in my mind and in those of teacher and pupil informants; I was well aware that schools are busy places and that teachers teach a number of different classes in any one day.

In addition, I asked the teachers to reflect on the usefulness of the English Language 5-14 Curricular Guidelines (SOEID, 1992) during the planning and assessment stages of the observed lessons. It has been noted in Chapter 1 that there are significant deficiencies in this document and I was interested to explore with the teachers if they had recognised these deficiencies and, if so, how they had taken account of them. This line of questioning led to a general discussion on the difficulties inherent in planning for the teaching and assessment of listening.

They were invited to outline the criteria used to select the 'good' and 'less successful' listeners and to explain the basis on which this selection was made. In light of their experience of the lessons taught, teacher informants were asked to reflect on the accuracy and appropriateness of their decisions. The final questions explored their views on how pupils could improve their own listening skills and teachers were also asked to consider what they felt their own development needs were in relation to listening. At the conclusion of each interview I thanked the informant again and asked whether he or she had any questions they would like to ask me.

### **Approach to the analysis of the findings**

In earlier sections of this chapter an account was offered of the ways in which every effort had genuinely been made to establish a relationship with each of the teacher participants within which they perceived us to be equal. It was important to the success of the project that there was no sense remaining of the inevitable imbalance in power which had previously existed when they were student teachers. Consequently, time was spent, prior to beginning the observation of ongoing work, the subsequent teaching of the lessons on listening and the interviews, in attempting to ensure that the teachers accepted that my attitude towards both them and their teaching was completely non-

judgemental. Rather, the whole enterprise was approached in the spirit of an explorer who:

Tends not always to know what they are looking for and will make sense of information as it is received by them as they go along.

(Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:296)

In other words, I sought to avoid any impression that an expert had arrived with all the answers and preconceived notions of what was to be discovered. This is not to suggest, however, that the whole process of inquiry was embarked on without having first formulated some tentative hypotheses about what might emerge from the collection and analysis of the data. Indeed, it seems to me that to claim that this were the case would be to deny my personal interest in, and study of, the topic over several years. As Riessman (1993) notes, 'the researcher needs at least some theoretical resources to guide the process of interpretation and representation'. The analytical approach adopted, therefore, was one which allowed me to speculate about the possible outcomes of the research, while remaining alert to findings which were unexpected.

### **Grounded theory or grounded in theory?**

A distinction which has emerged in the literature on research methods highlights the differences between *verification* and *discovery*. The former has traditionally been associated with an approach whereby existing theory serves as a framework to guide verification. In the latter, conclusions are not known until the research has been completed and the data analysed. Verification, favoured by those advocating quantitative methods, was criticised by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, who argued that 'such approaches led to theory that was impoverished, in the sense of having a restricted empirical relevance to any 'substantive' content domain'. Glaser and Strauss argued that to generate theory that was more local, contextual and relevant, a significant change in

philosophy was required 'to close the gap between theory and empirical research'.

Pidgeon (1996) offers a detailed account of the historical origins and development of the grounded theory approach, placing it firmly within the context of the wider debates that have taken place concerning the value and status of qualitative enquiry. The term 'grounded theory' was coined by Glaser and Strauss (1967:vii) in order to:

Express the idea of theory that is generated by (or grounded in) an iterative process involving the continual sampling and analysis of qualitative data gathered from concrete settings ... grounded theory places great emphasis on attention to participants' own accounts of social and psychological events and of their associated local phenomena and social worlds.

More recently, researchers have developed and expanded on grounded theory to incorporate, for example, hypothesis testing, and this has led to claims that such approaches are no longer true to the original. As a direct result of this, and in response to such questions as 'what grounds grounded theory?', it has been argued that it no longer makes sense to claim the research can develop either from the testing of theory (i.e. verification) or the inductive analysis of data (i.e. discovery); and that in the case of grounded theory, in particular, what emerges is the result of a complex and constant interplay between the data and the researcher's developing conceptualisations, or what Bulmer, (1979) calls 'a flip-flop between ideas and research experience'. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) propose that this process could best be called *theory generation* rather than one of *discovery*.

In light of the earlier account of how the research project was approached, Bulmer's metaphor is therefore particularly helpful in capturing the ongoing dynamic relationship and interaction between the data as it was generated, and my own constant refining and developing of theoretical concepts. The modified grounded theory approach, therefore, proposed by Henwood and Pidgeon, was

considered particularly appropriate and was deliberately adopted throughout each stage of this study. The particular methods used for the generation of concepts during the analysis of the data will be discussed in the final sections of this chapter.

### **Transcribing the interviews**

The transcription of the interviews, though an extremely time-consuming and often frustrating exercise, was nevertheless an important part of the research and was therefore treated seriously and afforded the same level of commitment as other parts of the project. My overriding concern in transcribing the interviews was to produce a transcript that was as detailed, accurate and comprehensive as possible and which captured faithfully not only what was said, but also the manner in which it was said. An obvious benefit during the process was the opportunity to become familiar with the data when listening, transcribing and checking for accuracy.

Considerable thought was given to the extent to which the respondents' utterances would be tidied up (i.e. removing phatics, repetitions, lengthy pauses etc.) since I was alert to the danger of losing important details and information. This was in no way a trivial matter, especially since forty of the respondents were children aged between eleven and twelve years and many struggled in their efforts to answer the questions (though most were willing to make a real effort) and to formulate their responses. After careful consideration it was decided that the transcripts would be as full, detailed and accurate as possible. Every word spoken, all pauses, interruptions, and hesitations etc. were therefore indicated, as were indications of the manner in which contributions had been made (i.e. *hesitantly, thoughtfully, confidently*). A transcription coding system was devised and adopted throughout. In those instances where pauses were deemed significant, this was carefully noted using the coding system. In doing



this in a deliberate and systematic manner, a high degree of consistency was achieved as the same conventions were used within and between transcripts. I was also alert, however, to the needs of the readers of the thesis, who would inevitably become frustrated with frequent interruptions to the flow of ideas. It was decided, therefore, that unnecessary and distracting fillers and pauses would be omitted when extracts from the transcripts were used in Chapters 5 and 6 in which the findings are reported.

Earlier in this chapter a description was offered of the interviewing technique adopted with both the teacher and the pupil informants. Rather than simply an asking and answering of questions, the interviews were viewed as an active and transactional process whereby interviewer and interviewees engaged in genuine interactions. Every effort was made in the transcriptions to ensure that this sense of collaboration would be captured and conveyed.

### **The process of analysis**

In this final section of the Chapter, an account will be offered of methods and procedures used to code and analyse the interview transcripts while at all times maintaining a clear focus on both the physical and the conceptual view of the data. This is not to suggest that the analysis of the transcripts was perceived as a completely separate process in the analysis of the data. As Hitchcock and Hughes note:

Since the researcher herself is a funnel through which the data are received, some form of analysis will take place simultaneously with the data collection.

(Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:296)

The observational part of the wider study, as has previously been noted, formed part of the wider project and insights gained from these observations were therefore brought to the process of analysis. Notes from these observations, and



plans for and transcripts of the actual teaching sessions, afforded me an opportunity to generate productive lines of questioning to be followed up in the interviews; this rich vein of additional knowledge proved invaluable at the more formal analysis stages of the research.

At this point a more inductive approach was adopted as the data were analysed and patterns, themes, consistencies and exceptions were identified. At this stage the main aim was to organise rather than to generate theoretical concepts from the data. Initial work on the teachers' transcripts was completed before moving to the pupils' interviews. A set of computer folders was made to organise all files belonging to teacher informants and another set for pupil informants. For example, in the folder *Teachers* were three further folders:

- (1) *Teachers' interviews*;
- (2) *Teachers' interviews annotated*;
- (3) *Themes*.

Folder (1) *Teachers' interviews* contained ten files, one for the transcript of each teacher interview; folder (2) *Teachers' interviews annotated* contained ten files, one for each annotated interview transcript; and folder (3) *Themes* contained a file for each of the themes and sub-themes that emerged.

Codes were established for each of the main themes and for the sub-themes which emerged from the data. For example, the main theme of *Genre* was identified when analysing the teachers' interviews and *general* comments within the extracts with regard to 'genre' were collected under this heading. Fifteen separate sub-themes for 'genre' were then identified and *specific* extracts were collected in folder (3) *Themes* for each subset. Such sub-themes included, for example, *Genre: narrative pull*; *Genre: scaffolding*; *Genre: metalanguage*. These sub-themes for 'genre', though closely interlinked, were at the same time conceptually distinct and distinctive. The strategy adopted throughout this process was to ask colleagues to check the emerging themes and sub-themes to ensure clarity and distinctiveness.

The extracts from the transcripts were annotated to identify exactly where different themes occurred. It was often the case that particular extracts contained several themes and, in such instances, they were included in the file for each of the different themes identified.

Each extract was given a code to ensure ease of identification and, when the need arose, to check the accuracy of an utterance. A teacher informant was therefore identified, for example, by the following code: 1 F MG (Teacher 1, Female, School) and a pupil informant with 24 M G SM (Pupil 24, Male, Good listener, School). It was therefore possible, at a glance, to establish the specific interview the extract had come from, the gender of the informant, whether the pupil had been identified as a 'good' or 'less successful' listener, and the school in which the research had taken place.

In the initial stages of analysis thirty-one main themes and sub-themes were identified within the teacher interviews and twenty-eight in the pupil interviews. (A full list of themes which emerged from analysis of the teachers' and the pupils' interviews is contained in Appendix (A)). In an attempt to ensure that the fine detail within responses was not lost, the initial approach was to identify the main, overarching themes and then to branch out from there. As the work of analysis progressed, therefore, and coding was refined, initial codings were expanded to allow for the sub-themes that emerged. On several occasions, however, separate themes were brought together under a single heading. In this way it was possible to ensure coherence and overall conceptual clarity, and to remain alert to the interconnections between the different themes that emerged. For example, under the theme *Social interaction in groups*, sub-themes included: *Group: exploratory talk*, *Group: norms*, *Group: social obligations*, etc. though when discussing metacognition relevant extracts were also taken from *Social obligations* in which pupils discussed the ways in which perceived social obligations determined appropriate metacognitive behaviour in group

interactions. The extract was therefore copied into each of the relevant files. Coding in this way therefore allowed me to provide an appropriately differentiated picture of a complex set of data. A single extract, for example, was coded [1 F MG. GROUP: SOCIAL GROUP: OBLIGATIONS; GROUP: NORMS; SOCIAL IDENTITY; GENRE: SCAFFOLDING].

Breaking down the data into codes in this way, therefore, not only helped me to organise it into manageable pieces; it also allowed for the identification of relationships between units of meaning. Devising separate codes, while at the same time demonstrating their interconnectedness, captured the sheer complexity of the listening practices which were occurring within these classrooms and which emerged clearly from the data. In this sense the coding was central to the process of analysis as it helped me to assign meaning. This idea is captured by Miles and Huberman, who suggest that:

To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesised, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relationship between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis. This part of analysis involves how you differentiate and combine the data you have retrieved and the reflections you make about this information.

(Miles and Huberman, 1994:56)

The preceding paragraphs have outlined the ways in which every effort was made to maintain an overarching *conceptual view of the data*, however fragmentary, as being part of a broader whole. Identifying themes and sub-themes allowed me to begin to 'dissect [the data] meaningfully'; establishing the interconnectedness of the emerging themes and their relationships, and keeping them 'intact', ensured that an overall sense of the whole was maintained.

Turning now to the interpretation of the data, a central concern during this stage of the process was to ensure that careful account was taken of the relationship between the studies discussed earlier in Chapters 2 and 3 and the findings from the present study. Such a focus ensured that both similarities and differences were identified, and that the findings of this research would be carefully framed

in the Discussion Chapter (Chapter 7) in terms of the theoretical perspectives previously discussed. Remaining alert to the ways in which my own findings concurred with, but in several important ways challenged, earlier work also allowed me to point to the need to reconceptualise key theoretical concepts.

## **Summary**

In Chapter 4 a detailed account has been offered of key methodological decisions and considerations throughout the research. The overall research design was outlined and justified, and the ways in which triangulation formed an integral part of that design were described. Sampling decisions, contrasting school settings and ethical issues were discussed and the observational studies delineated. General aspects concerning the interview process for both teacher and pupil informants were explored, and the specific content of both sets of interviews was summarised. The Chapter concluded with a detailed account of the approaches adopted for the analysis of the data and justification was offered for decisions made. Turning now to the reporting of the findings, and in the interest of clarity of exposition, a separate chapter will be offered for the teachers' interviews and for the pupils' interviews. Chapter 5, therefore, will report on key findings that emerged from the teachers' interviews.

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on listening from the point of view of the ten teachers who were interviewed. It has been noted in Chapter 4 that these interviews were designed to operate on two distinct levels:

- to explore the teachers' general knowledge and beliefs about listening and invite them to reflect on particular aspects of listening within classrooms, and
- to pose very specific questions concerning the listening lessons that had been observed.

The report of findings contained in the following sections begins by discussing the ways in which the teacher participants talked about and specifically represented listening in different contexts. Attention then shifts to their accounts of the wide range of activities they engaged in to support and 'scaffold' their pupils' listening. The next section focuses on the ways in which the teachers helped pupils to frame their listening within specific genres; and the importance that these teachers place on awareness of features of different genres to pupils' ability to monitor and control their listening is highlighted. An account is then given of how listening is embedded within the social context of these teachers' classrooms, and of the distinction made between intellectual cognitive demands and social cognitive demands placed on pupils.



## Teachers' talk about and representations of listening

It is of interest to note, within the context of the present study, that when talking about listening most of the teachers only drew on the discourse of cognitive psychology when they were asked directly to describe the processes that pupils engage in when they are listening. Most of them had studied psychology in their undergraduate degrees, all had attended lectures and seminars on cognitive psychology and learning theories as part of their Initial Teacher Education course, and all therefore had ready access to an appropriate language for discussing individual cognitive processing. The following extract is typical of most responses:

Interviewer: I want to move on a bit now and discuss the actual process of listening itself. If you think of your own listening, as an adult listener, can you tell me what happens when we listen? What are the cognitive dimensions involved when we listen?

Teacher: I always worry about that word cognitive. I've been thinking about this. I thought you'd ask something like this. Well, first of all there is a sound, or a message or something and it reaches the ears. So, we're paying attention to this message and we've got to sort out what we think it means. Do we understand it – that seems important to me, because if we don't understand it we have to try to make some sense of it don't we?

Teacher 1

Almost every teacher highlighted the importance of actually being able to hear the message; of perception; of interpretation and understanding; of concentration and attention; of memory; of motivation to listen; of internal and external factors which facilitated or prevented effective listening; of visual cues; and of responding to listening. With regard to responding, what emerged during these accounts of cognitive processing (and what became clear throughout their interviews) was that these teachers viewed listening and responding as being intricately and inextricably linked and, even when asked questions about individual cognitive processing, most drew on a transactional



view of language, and instinctively moved towards discourses which firmly situated listening within the context of their classroom practices. The subtleties and fine shading of such classroom practices will be discussed in the sections which follow.

Several participants characterised listening as a 'life skill', although they tended to do this only when emphasising the need to value the development of listening and to give it a more important place within the school curriculum. This idea is captured in the following teacher's account in which her transactional view of language also clearly emerges:

In many ways the more I've thought about listening and that how I do feel it's neglected, but it seems to me it's the groundstone of so much else – and not just in school, and I think that's the very reason why it has been neglected, because you tend to – it sort of gets absorbed by those other things that we focus on such as reading and writing, because we think it's sort of intrinsically part of that.

Teacher 9

This teacher participant, as was the case with most, commented on the continuing focus on the teaching of reading and writing in schools at the expense of, among other things, listening and skills in oral communication. The teachers readily acknowledged what they perceived to be the shortcomings of their own educational experience in preparing them to teach listening both at school and subsequently at university where attention was paid to reading and writing. Although they were alert to, and aware of, the similarities between the receptive modes of reading and listening and the productive modes of writing and talking, some struggled to draw connections between their representations of these language modes. Others, however, had more success:

I wanted to get the pupils to be more aware of how characters are revealed to us through animation. I was interested in raising their awareness of what goes on in their heads – when they listen to and watch people talk – in terms of the information they recall

and why they recall it – the visual and non-verbal clues that feed into their judgements and opinions. I asked them to think of me as a character they had come across in their lives, one who will disappear, and I ‘revealed’ myself to them with the, my autobiographical presentation. Then they had to write down what they remembered about all the facts I conveyed, any tones of voice and body language, and come to some conclusions about the kind of person they thought I was from the information I’d given and the way it was given. I suppose what I was trying to do was to – sort of unearth for myself the syntactic and semantic components of the listening process – you can tell I’ve been reading – but I was also interested in pragmatic considerations. I wanted to get them to realise that they form opinions – have beliefs, make judgements about people because of their ability to ‘read’ the voice and the body and not simply listen to the words used to carry the information. This introduction was to be a springboard to studying how characters are presented in animation.

Teacher 9

In this fine-grained account of *interpretative* listening this teacher offers a view of listening which is constructed within a framework of her existing linguistic knowledge of reading, and she is able to move beyond a traditional view of reading a printed text towards listening to, watching and ‘reading’ not only the information presented orally by the speaker’s autobiographical presentation, but ‘reading the voice and the body and not simply the words’. This teacher talked about listening in ways which situated it firmly within the context of the classroom, made reference to the demands of particular classroom circumstances and couched her response in terms of text, context and social interaction.

### **Teacher scaffolding of pupils’ listening**

The teachers’ accounts of the many and varied ways in which they scaffolded pupils’ listening – provided in their written teaching plans and in their interviews – though detailed and fine-grained, did not reflect the full extent of what was witnessed by the researcher during the observational studies. In light

of this, and to offer as full and accurate picture as possible, the following sections will draw not only on these teaching plans and interviews but also on the observational study which formed part of the wider research project. To ensure clarity in the description of the complex and multi-layered picture which emerged with regard to teacher scaffolding of pupils' listening at each stage of their planning and teaching, the kind of support provided is organised in the sections which follow under the five headings:

- before task activities
- during task activities
- after task activities
- differentiation
- assisting pupils to scaffold and support each other's listening.

It is important to note, however, that although it has been necessary to describe these activities separately, the observational studies revealed the extent to which these teachers were able to blend their chosen approaches in a coherent, unitary way. Although a full and detailed list is provided in the tables which follow of the approaches observed, it is not the purpose within the current section to analyse each one in the same depth. Rather, the focus will be firmly on what proved to be the most important scaffolding activities which emerged, and accordingly these will be indicated in the following tables in bold print.

*Before task activities*

Table 5:1 summarises the range of activities that teachers engaged in before pupils embarked on tasks.

Table 5:1 Before task scaffolding activities

Teacher scaffolding: before the task	
–	providing appropriate overall structure for the task, and models of well-structured texts
–	breaking the task down into appropriate, well-sequenced, learning steps
–	priming
–	activating prior knowledge
–	linking to experience of previous tasks
–	linking to prior levels of achievement
–	sharing learning objectives
–	cueing pupils into the genre features of the text
–	providing an appropriate metalanguage
–	encouraging metacognitive behaviours
	encouraging prediction within listening
	questioning by, and of, the teacher
	teachers offering, and pupils seeking, clarification
	explaining listening behaviour

It is significant to note that the list provided in the preceding table of ‘before task activities’ is longer than those provided in later sections for either the ‘during task activities’ or the ‘after task activities’. Not only did teachers draw attention in their accounts to the care and attention that had been given during the planning stages to the structuring of listening tasks, but justifications were also offered for the choice of tasks, texts, contexts and different media used. The teachers explained how they activated pupils’ prior knowledge, thereby ascertaining what they already knew, and then matched tasks accordingly to

build on and develop further existing knowledge, skills and understanding. In this way, pupils were prepared for future listening demands. All ten teachers highlighted the crucial importance of providing tasks which would be successful in engaging pupil interest and sustaining their motivation.

These teachers were well aware of the value of effective planning, of providing a logical structure for lessons, and of breaking them down into well-sequenced and manageable learning steps. Models of well-structured texts were provided and pupils were engaged collaboratively in analysing them and identifying their underlying structures and specific genre features. In discussing the value of offering well-structured texts for analysis one teacher commented:

But if the text they're listening to is well structured, well-written and they know that structure and can anticipate it, predict what will come next, then they won't find the listening so difficult.

Teacher 4

This teacher was alert to the benefits of familiarising pupils with the underlying structures of texts, using high quality examples, to support their listening and encourage appropriate metacognitive behaviours.

Such activities were designed not only to support pupils' subsequent listening activities, but also to provide them with an appropriate metalanguage with which to discuss the different features of texts. One teacher described how she used both the printed and media versions of the dramatic monologue *The Lady of Letters* to teach the genre markers of this form and to introduce pupils to the specific language they would require to engage in critical and analytical discussion:

Well, I was – I was trying to get them to realise just how much we – when we listen and watch – how much we could pick up from non-verbal communication and I began with the Patricia Routledge dramatic monologue *The Lady Of Letters*. I think it's wonderful and they seemed to enjoy it as well. I spent quite a bit

of time first establishing – I wanted to find out what they already knew about non-verbal communication and about dramatic monologue as well to prepare them for the tasks and I'd sorted out some of the vocabulary they'd need to discuss the form of monologue. Then I began by showing them the first few scenes and we discussed how the narrative, the storyline, was established and how it developed. It's important that they understood that because this is a dramatic monologue and it's – it's harder to – there are fewer ways to keep the narrative going and to develop character.

Teacher 1

This teacher began with establishing what pupils already knew about the specific literary form of dramatic monologue; their knowledge of the metalanguage required to discuss the literary conventions associated with the form; their familiarity with the different ways in which messages are conveyed and meaning is constructed through the use of non-verbal communication; and their knowledge of the metalanguage used to discuss non-verbal communication, and he planned lessons which took account of and built upon pupils' existing knowledge. There was no doubt that the teachers believed all pupils would benefit from being taught the metalanguage required for discussing and analysing texts:

Teaching needs to be in place because the ones (i.e. pupils) that haven't picked up the vocabulary that's appropriate to the different styles are at sea.

Teacher 7

In a similar, but slightly different vein, another teacher noted:

What I tend to do is draw their attention to the sort of genre markers which fit the rest of the text.

Teacher 5

Preparing pupils in this way therefore allowed teachers to cue them in to the genre markers of texts and supported them in framing their listening



accordingly. This theme of 'cueing in' emerged in the majority of teacher interviews, in relation both to imaginative fiction and also to non-fiction texts:

They were listening for specific cues in the genre (lessons) so they were actually listening and watching together for cues that were going to help them identify what genre it was, they were actually processing information or clues.

Teacher 7

The central importance of genre awareness in helping pupils to frame their listening emerged as a recurring theme throughout the teacher interviews, and this will be examined in detail later in this chapter. In introducing tasks teachers primed pupils in a number of different ways. The work of establishing what pupils already knew; of cueing them into the underlying structural features and genre markers of texts; of explicitly sharing learning objectives for tasks; of linking current tasks to previous learning; and of ensuring that pupils were aware of how they would be assessed and against what criterion statements their learning would be measured revealed the extent to which teachers were engaged in scaffolding pupils' listening *before they actually embarked on tasks*. In addition, teachers during this phase modelled and encouraged specific metacognitive behaviours as pupils were asked to predict, to question (themselves, other pupils, teachers), seek clarification (from other pupils and from teachers) and to explain (to other pupils, and to teachers).

### *During task activities*

Turning now to the different ways in which teachers scaffolded pupils' listening during tasks, the following table provides a summary of the different methods adopted.

Table 5:2 During task scaffolding activities

Teacher scaffolding: during the task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- contextualising</li><li>- explaining</li><li>- teacher 'think aloud' modelling of cognitive processes</li><li>- teacher modelling strategies to monitor understanding</li><li>- teacher modelling of appropriate listening behaviours</li><li>- questioning of/by pupils while on task</li><li>- asking for clarification</li><li>- repetition</li></ul>

Building on the *before task* phase of scaffolding, the teachers continued to support pupils as they were engaged on the listening tasks. Such support took different forms. They continued to help pupils contextualise current listening activity within the wider context of previous listening tasks; they offered and sought clarification and explanation; and they modelled their own cognitive processes when engaged in listening tasks by articulating them and thereby making these processes explicit. Almost all teachers used the 'think aloud' strategy to give pupils direct access to 'what was going on in their heads'. One used the strategy of 'friend on my shoulder' where the 'friend' was not only an immediate 'audience' for her thought processes when engaged on a particular activity, but at times undertook the task of questioning or asking for clarification or explanation, and thus modelled strategies to monitor understanding. Sometimes this friend was an equal; at other times she assumed the role of the teacher. In this way a 'dialogue' occurred and pupils were given the opportunity to 'hear' the interaction between learner and learner and also between 'expert' and the 'novice'. This approach builds on and develops further the ideas of Murray (1982) who discussed the development of pupils' metacognitive strategies when they were engaged in the process of writing:

The act of writing might be described as a conversation between two workmen muttering to each other at the workbench. The self speaks, the other self listens and responds. The self proposes, the other self considers. The self makes, the other self evaluates. The two selves collaborate: a problem is spotted, discussed, defined; solutions are proposed, rejected, suggested, attempted, tested, discarded, accepted.

(Murray, 1982:165)

Just as Murray represented the process of writing as dialogic, so these teachers, in discussing their practices in modelling and encouraging appropriate metacognitive strategies, were drawing on their representations of listening which characterised it as dialogic. Teachers also modelled appropriate listening behaviours in the sense of adopting an appropriately attentive, engaged and socially responsive manner when interacting with pupils on a one-to-one basis, in small groups and with the whole class, and they considered this to be a key part of their role.

The transcripts and observations revealed that different approaches to the modelling of appropriate listening behaviours were therefore adopted depending on the context for listening (i.e. intrapersonal – when listening to ‘self’ working alone on a task); interpersonal – when listening to others in a group or class); on the genre of the text (i.e. imaginative fiction, non-fiction); and on the medium (i.e. whether the task involved listening to an oral text, or listening to and watching a visual text).

Engaging in discussion of the different purposes for listening, however, proved considerably more problematic for teachers, and what emerged clearly from the interviews and the observations was that the concept of listening for different purposes was considerably more complex than has been previously recognised. Although all ten believed that listeners adapt their listening behaviours depending on their purpose for listening, and more than half noted that at certain times they listened for multiple purposes, most struggled to explain

what the differences were. The following extract from teacher 1 reveals that while she was clearly aware of the five main purposes for listening identified by Wolvin and Coakley, (1993) – discriminatory, appreciative, comprehensive, critical, and therapeutic – and of the fact that she adjusts her own listening behaviours depending on her purpose(s) for listening, she could not explain what these differences were:

I think it has to be different. I think – well, I think that if we're simply listening for pleasure to a piece of music it must be different to listening for specific pieces of information from a non-fiction text. It must be. I'm just not sure how it's different. And listening to identify the tone of a speaker must be different again. Listening to understand the feelings of a character in a story – I just don't know. I don't listen in the same way to everything – I listen really carefully, for example, my ears prick up, when I listen to the news for the weather forecast when I've got to drive because I hate driving in the snow and ice – or to the next stage in the teachers' pay negotiations – yes I listen in quite a different way to these things than to – for example – when I listen to my friend moan yet again about her latest boyfriend. I mean, I sympathise, empathise, try to be a good friend and a good listener, but it's not the same – I'm sorry, I just can't answer that one.

Teacher 1

Another teacher, in response to this question, stated explicitly that it 'might be to do with attention', but also suggested implicitly that motivation played a role in listening successfully for different purposes. In her account she draws parallels between different purposes for listening and different 'attention settings':

Teacher: Yes, I think they're listening in quite a different way.

Interviewer: So what is the difference?

Teacher: Well it might be to do with the attention almost, when they'll tune in and when they'll tune out. It might also be partly to do with – if you have said, "I want you to listen to this extract because we're going to talk about how the characters – we're going to discuss the characters' emotions at the end", they'll

probably identify with the character as they're listening in order to have an idea what kind of emotions I might expect them to talk about. They're not going to identify with a character if all they've to do is locate where the metaphor that he has used is. Do you know what I mean?

Teacher 2

What emerged from the transcripts was that while most teachers were well able to model a range of cognitive behaviours with regard to listening, they experienced real difficulties in articulating their own cognitive activity in terms of individual information processing when they listened for different purposes. As the preceding quotations reveal, they were clearly conscious of the fact that that they were frequently adjusting their own listening behaviours; of the range and flexibility of their listening; and of the demands of text and context. The observations revealed the skill with which the teachers communicated to pupils the different demands of listening, and alerted them to many of the ways in which they could frame and guide their listening. In discussing text and context teachers drew readily on their own classroom practices to explain how they supported and scaffolded pupils' listening; in other words, their frames of reference were firmly situated in the classroom. This was not the case, however, when discussing listening purposes, and teachers were unable to draw on the discourse of cognitive psychology and individual processing to explain what happened when individuals listened for different purposes. What emerged from their accounts was that in response to questions concerning listening purposes, the teachers instinctively drew on their classroom work with text and context, thereby demonstrating implicit awareness of the inherent difficulties in separating any discussion of purposes from the texts and contexts in which they actually occur.

In light of the preceding analysis it seems reasonable to suggest that these teachers' difficulties in discussing cognitive activity with regard to listening purposes need not necessarily be construed and discussed in terms of a teacher deficit model. Rather, it should be acknowledged that the relationship between



cognitive activity and purposes is considerably more complex than has previously been realised. It may be the case that it is not possible to discuss listening purposes in terms of individual cognitive processing, and that a more helpful approach would be to consider the different ways in which purposes are tailored and differentiated to meet the needs and demands of texts and contexts. This is an important point; if purposes for listening are inextricably tied up with texts, and the role of the teacher is to somehow get pupils to 'buy into' the different ways of interpreting different genres depending on both the texts' purposes and their own purposes for listening, then teachers will require tools to help them take this ahead. If purposes and contexts are similarly interlinked, the picture becomes even more complex. To draw such conclusions – however tentatively – would have important implications for the ways in which language is taught and how it is described and analysed in government curricular documents. This will be discussed fully in Chapter 7.

### *After task activities*

Teacher scaffolding continued when pupils were encouraged, on the completion of listening tasks, to reflect on and evaluate both process and outcome. Several teachers explicitly modelled the different ways in which such reflection and evaluation could become an integral part of the learning process and offered pupils an appropriate structure and language. The phrase 'developing pupil awareness' featured frequently in both the teachers' accounts of how they supported pupil reflection and evaluation, and in the researcher's observations of their interactions with pupils. Pupils' awareness of how they had coped with tasks; of how they had dealt with and overcome difficulties with their listening; and their awareness of what had been learned from current listening to inform and guide future listening formed a significant and important part of teacher/pupil dialogues. Approaches observed are listed in Table 5:3.



Table 5:3 After task scaffolding activities

Teacher scaffolding: after the task	
–	reflecting
–	evaluating
–	encouraging transfer of skills
–	valuing different levels of achievement

These pupils were not all working towards a common point by which success or failure would be determined. Rather, the assessment criterion statements in the teachers’ plans had been differentiated to take account of the different levels of ability within these classes and success was therefore determined by each individual’s progress and achievements rather than against a norm. Other approaches to differentiation are outlined below in Table 5:4.

*Differentiation*

Nine of the ten classes observed contained pupils with a wide range of needs and abilities, and teachers took account of this diversity by differentiating at the planning, implementation and assessment stages of their teaching. Teacher support in the ways outlined in the preceding paragraphs occurred throughout. Teachers offered individual support to pupils and also to small groups engaged on listening tasks. In some classes the listening texts given to pupils were differentiated, and less able pupils worked with texts in which the language, ideas and concepts were less complex than those offered to more able pupils. In other classes teachers decided to offer the same text to all pupils, and differentiate by means of offering different tasks, different levels of teacher support and allow pupils to work at their own pace. Audio and visual resources were frequently used to differentiate both the kind and level of support offered. In every class observed pupils were encouraged to work

collaboratively in groups (or in pairs) and in this way peer support was a feature of each lesson. Pupils worked in mixed ability friendship groups, and in groups in which they were placed depending on their ability.

Table 5:4 Differentiation

Differentiation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– teacher support</li><li>– differentiated tasks</li><li>– differentiated texts</li><li>– peer support from group/paired tasks</li><li>– audio/visual support</li><li>– flexible pacing</li><li>– assessment</li><li>– valuing different levels of achievement</li></ul>

*Assisting pupils to scaffold and support each other's listening*

The preceding account has outlined the different ways in which the teachers scaffolded their pupils' listening, but it is of interest to note that they did not view scaffolding as solely the responsibility of teachers; rather, they modelled the different ways in which pupils could support each other's listening and they were successful in creating supportive environments within which pupils felt confident in assuming this role. Because of this the group and paired work observed in many lessons were qualitatively different in nature and content from those observed in other classrooms.

What becomes clear from this detailed description of these teachers' scaffolding of listening is that they were offering support in ways which move beyond

Bruner's (1986) traditional account of scaffolding when pupils *are engaged on a task*. Goodman and Goodman (1990) [in an article called 'Vygotsky in a Whole-language Perspective'] argued that 'effective teachers know how to create conditions that will cause learners to exhibit and make the most of their zones of proximal development.' A similarly broad view of scaffolding, (which acknowledges the importance of the careful, deliberate creation of whole contexts for learning) is required to take account of the findings that emerged from the observations and the interviews reported on in this chapter. The need to widen current definitions of scaffolding will be discussed in Chapter 7.

### **Genre and listening**

It has been noted earlier in the chapter that the teacher participants believed that one of the most important ways of scaffolding pupils' listening was to ensure that they were aware of the different features associated with different genres of texts, and of the ways in which different communicative purposes impact on their listening. All were alert to the fact that different texts placed different kinds of demands on pupils, that some pupils found particular genres more demanding than others; and teachers were aware of the strategies they used when their own listening was unsuccessful and meaning broke down.

### ***Narrative pull***

In discussing the demands of different genres nine of the ten teachers indicated that they believed pupils found listening to imaginative fictional texts, with their strong narratives, considerably easier than listening to non-fiction texts. Several reasons were offered to support these views. Pupils have traditionally been taught to read using narrative fiction, and thus from an early age have become familiar with and have internalised narrative structures. In both primary and secondary schools, these teachers believed, there continued to be considerably

less access to non-fiction texts than to fiction, and in both sectors the whole class texts chosen for pupils were imaginative fiction. In their experience pupils who continued to read for pleasure, and who developed a 'reading habit', tended to favour fiction (though one teacher noted that non-fiction texts were sometimes selected by boys from school libraries). Long familiarity with narrative fictional genres with powerful narratives, they suggested, could exert a strong 'pull' on listening which would support pupils' listening as they engaged with tasks associated with narrative fiction. The following quotations demonstrate the different ways in which teachers expressed this concept of narrative 'pull':

We're carried along with the familiar pattern of stories and we know roughly what to expect.

Teacher 3

I mean, we all – we're all very familiar with stories, with narrative and we recognise the pattern as we hear the story so that makes it easy – easier.

Teacher 1

The pathway is, in a sense, made for you, you keep going with that or you like a character or you think the character's like you or your pal. You identify with that character.

Teacher 10

Possibly ones that may be their most familiar – certainly when they come to secondary school they may be most familiar with listening to – with being read a text – often you'll do almost mythical stories or fairy tale stories or ones which almost have a genre that it's traditional in a sense – that they have been texts that have been read to them orally and they can still connect to them. It's not a new – a sort of – they associate that text with listening to rather than them themselves reading it. I think it's almost like they remember that this is a text you listen to and they can settle down – and that's – partly again a visual listening thing but sort of text where you can intersperse with pictures that they are looking at in the books of animals – they love the memory of being read to in primary school and that's what you recreate and they can listen to and they connect that genre with listening to you rather than, "Off you go and read your own book" I think.

Teacher 8

Teacher 10, quoted above, echoes many of the points made in the transcripts in general and in the quotations above in particular, but articulates her understanding in terms of the existing schema that pupils have of texts that they bring to their listening. Her response builds on and develops further the idea of familiarity and introduces the concept of memory and its role in effective listening. The 'pathways' have been established, and the listener recalls them, has ready access to them and can make use of them. Teacher 8, in a similar yet slightly different vein, discusses the idea that not only does the 'pull' come from familiarity with the narrative genre, but also suggests that it is the result of triggered memories of the pleasures of being read to in primary schools. This extract conveys clearly pupils' strong affective responses to being read to, and the benefits to their listening in attempting to recreate environments within which such positive responses are replicated.

Not all imaginative texts, however, were considered to be equal in terms of difficulty, and several teachers noted that poetry, because of its unpredictable structures and complexly interwoven ideas, could prove particularly challenging for pupils:

They would probably, and this is probably to do with habituation – they probably find a poem quite hard because poetry tends to be elliptical, it's a puzzle.

Teacher 10

But with a poem, say, I think more intellectually is demanded of the listener, so I think it must be a different listening activity. They've got to work out, they've got to work out how the meaning and rhythm might relate, they can't – I take it we're just listening and not reading it at all, we're just listening? So there's more of a burden on the listener I think to do that. So if they're not very familiar with – if you took a ballad for instance which has a narrative but is quite clear, but for instance they might not appreciate that there might be a refrain or refrained lines so they might find that a hurdle, because the expectations of what's to



come is – perhaps they are just less tuned, they're less familiar with it.

Teacher 4

The themes of familiarity with underlying structures, with markers of the genre, and with searching for meaning emerge as teachers engaged with this question.

It was not the case that all teachers concurred with the view that pupils found it easier to listen to imaginative fiction. Teacher 7 notes that in certain circumstances pupils might find it easier to listen to non-fiction texts:

I think that, if it is a simple informational text, yes that's easier for them. It's easier and they would know much more clearly what they were to do as it's quite clear so therefore yes, they would listen better. I feel that that it was much harder for them what I was actually doing, what I was trying to get them to listen and watch for was possibly quite demanding.

Teacher 7

This teacher's position, however, is not quite as clear-cut as might appear at first reading of this extract. She qualifies her response by adding that both the degree of text difficulty, and the nature and quality of teacher scaffolding, are important factors in determining pupils' success with listening to both non-fiction texts and fictional texts. Only one teacher suggested that an individual's inherent interest in a topic or subject matter was the determining factor in establishing pupils' engagement with listening, not the genre of the text at all:

But then if they're a person that is more interested in hearing about the life cycle of a locust than they are in hearing a magical fairytale then I think the listening would be to do with the interest that they'd bring, that they have in the particular text. Yes, OK, I would argue it wasn't genre specific, it was how interested they were in that particular listening activity.

Teacher 8

It is of interest to note that many *pupil* participants, in responding to questions concerning the demands of listening to different genres of texts, indicated that



they experienced less difficulties with non-fiction genres and to justify their responses offered such reason as familiarity with predictable structures of non-fiction texts; clear listening purposes; and helpful teacher scaffolding. This will be reported on fully in Chapter 6 in which an analysis is offered of the pupils' interviews.

### **Genre and monitoring and control of listening**

In response to questions about whether – and how – they adjusted their own listening behaviours depending on the genre of the text, most participants made a clear distinction between *automatic* listening and *conscious control* of listening. Not all agreed however about exactly which point listening effort moved from being automatic to being conscious and deliberate. Teacher 3 on this theme suggests that conscious listening occurs only for a very short period of time at the beginning of a listening event:

Let's say I switch the radio on and I don't know right away what I'm listening to. So I listen carefully to the first two or three seconds and I *immediately* recognise 'book at bedtime' or the news or a biography of someone or something. I don't think to myself, 'Oh, this has the genre markers of X or Y so I must be listening to that and I'm going to listen in this way' – my brain automatically does that for me, I think. A bit like a computer. So I keep listening.

Teacher 3

Her listening therefore moves very quickly into the phase of what she calls 'automatic listening' when her brain takes over and 'works like a computer'. What is interesting in this account is that the teacher does not appear to recognise that, although she is not consciously aware that she is picking up on the markers of the genre of the text to which she is listening, this is clearly happening on a subconscious level. In contrast to Teacher 3, Teacher 1 believes that the conscious phase continues considerably longer:

I think it probably stays very deliberate for *quite a while* until we're absolutely sure – until we know we can make sense of what we're hearing – we've got it right. Then it becomes less conscious, more unconscious again. The important thing is that it has to make sense to us. Because that's what we're always trying to do, make sense of what we hear, make it *mean* something to us. And it can't really until we're sure of what kind of thing we're listening to can it?

Teacher 1

This quotation highlights the central idea that listeners listen for meaning – they strive to make sense of what they are hearing – and suggests that until that meaning is emerging clearly then listening continues to be deliberate and conscious. Only when we can make sense of what we are hearing can listening become automatic. The themes of searching for meaning and exercising conscious control over listening continued as teachers explained what happened to their listening when meaning broke down or when initial expectations from a text were not realised. Here, for example, is Teacher 1 on this theme:

Listening is automatic until something happens, if we're not too sure. Then we look for clues don't we? We're checking to see if we're right, if our first hunch is right. Checking to see if it makes sense to think, 'This is a story', or 'This is a documentary. Does it fit in with our pattern for stories or documentaries?' So we listen really carefully for a while to keep checking, see we're getting it right and whether we understand what's going on.

Teacher 1

I think then if there's something to contradict that initial decision the listening stops being automatic because then I would think to myself, 'Oh, this wasn't what I'd expected, what's going on here?' and I'd pay much closer attention until I'd sorted it out again properly. So, that would be very deliberate wouldn't it? I think I'd keep paying close attention for a while until I was sure I had it right this time and it was making sense to me. Because that's what's important isn't it, that it makes sense to us whatever it is?

Teacher 3

While teachers were not asked directly whether they believed that pupils were engaged in similar searches for meaning or if they, like their teachers,

deliberately looked for clues by identifying genre markers of texts when understanding broke down, several teachers volunteered the opinion that it would be unreasonable to assume that pupils would necessarily be able to engage in such levels of cognitive activity. Furthermore, one suggested that approaches adopted by experienced adults might simply be impossible for less experienced young people because of their developmental stage. Notwithstanding such concerns, it is important to note that these teachers were engaging in metacognitive behaviours as they monitored and controlled their own listening and, significantly, their accounts of such metacognitive behaviours resonate with the discussion earlier in Chapter 3 where it was suggested that to behave in ways which are genuinely metacognitive is to be able to monitor and to exert conscious control over one's own thought processes when engaged on tasks. The teachers' own accounts revealed such awareness and control; and the observations revealed that they could articulate their thought processes as they modelled metacognitive scaffolding strategies for their pupils. Significantly, however, they underestimated the effect that such teaching had had on their own pupils' ability both to engage in metacognitive behaviours and to discuss them during their interviews. In other words, these pupils were indeed aware of the metacognitive practices that their teachers wanted them to pursue.

Listening in these classrooms was perceived to be an integral part of the flow of interaction – social interaction within particular contexts, with different texts, for different purposes and with different media; in other words these teachers viewed language from a transactional perspective. When listening is viewed as part of the flow of social interaction, the metaphor of executive control, with its suggestion of setting fairly tight guidelines for action, would appear to carry a sense of rigidity which does not sit readily with the idea of flow. An analysis of the teachers' accounts and the observations reveals that these teachers, with their focus on the contexts, purposes and the cultural tools which make it possible to frame and scaffold pupils' listening and control of that listening,

were drawing on a conceptualisation of metacognition which goes beyond traditional conceptualisations. Chapter 6 will demonstrate the extent to which the pupils themselves were indeed aware of these practices; their ability to regulate their own listening; and the cultural tools which enabled them to do this.

### **Listening in the social contexts of classrooms**

As well as focussing on the cognitive demands associated with helping pupils to frame their listening within particular genres, teachers also discussed the sociocognitive demands of listening within the context of a classroom. In previous sections of this chapter, the teachers' accounts of the cognitive demands associated with listening to and watching a particular genre of text have been examined; in this section the focus will shift to the additional demands associated with listening to 'read' a person, and to 'read' a social interaction. In classrooms two distinctly different kinds of social transactions occur: there are interactions between teachers and pupils and there are interactions between groups of pupils. While there are similarities in terms of the demands of 'reading' these different social transactions, there are also distinct differences.

#### ***Norms of listening***

The preceding sections have demonstrated the significance that the teacher participants placed on the quality of the social relationships and transactions that occurred in classrooms, and on the importance of teachers and pupils assuming responsibility for the success of such transactions. When they were discussing the topic of the nature and quality of transactions which occurred when pupils were working in groups, what emerged was that these teachers clearly viewed listening in classrooms very much in normative terms. Not only

did they expect pupils to engage fully and readily with the listening task, they also expected them to adopt an appropriate way of interacting with peers which demonstrated respect for others and for their opinions. It was acknowledged, however, that many pupils – and indeed many adults – find it difficult to adopt and sustain such behaviours. When discussing the behaviour of her peers at a recent teacher inservice session, one teacher commented:

Listening in groups. Well, of course they do lots of that. They work in groups or pairs quite a lot. But some of them find that – really find that hard, you know, to really work as part of a group. But then adults find it hard as well. You go to some of these inservices and the teachers are behaving as badly as some of the kids in the groups, when they're asked to work as a group – think of all the times we sit through sessions that don't really interest us but we know we should be listening so we move into another gear and put in the extra effort to listen. Yes, a listener can do that – can think, 'I'm going to make a bit of an effort here', even though they're not too interested.

Teacher 1

Her sense of commitment to the group, and of her own ability to decide to *make an effort* to engage despite her own lack of inherent interest emerges as she explains her increased efforts in the transaction. The responsibility of a group member to make an effort was explored by all teachers. Here is another of the teachers on this topic:

I hate it when I realise I've spoken in a group and I'm waiting for a response and realise the person who should be responding hasn't listened. It's really bad manners and gives out all the wrong kinds of messages to the person speaking. Maybe this isn't the intention, maybe the person isn't feeling well or is upset about something and finding it hard to concentrate but we're not mind-readers and it's poor group behaviour, I think. People should make an effort, especially if they're in the business of trying to teach kids to be good in group discussions.

Teacher 3

One teacher described her own efforts to meet her responsibilities to the group effort, and her attempts to demonstrate socially supportive listening behaviours:



I'd try in the group to be supportive and help it along. I'd try to do what I think kids should be learning to do – to support, encourage, listen to what others have to say, try to – try to make it work. So I'd try to listen in a way that helped me to do that.

Teacher 1

This extract also captures the teacher's belief that she should be modelling for her pupils the kinds of behaviours she expects from them; and that in this way she is scaffolding their listening. The observational studies revealed this teacher's – and indeed all of the teachers' – success in providing appropriate models of how group members should interact in ways which resulted in positive interactions. For example, in one lesson the teacher demonstrated how to listen to build on another pupil's ideas; to challenge; to question and ask for clarification; and to introduce new ideas for consideration in ways which were constructive and helpful. The teachers' sense of their own responsibilities in behaving in a socially supportive and acceptable manner within group transactions emerged throughout the interviews, and several expressed this in terms of their sense of moral obligation to behave and respond in an appropriate manner. One respondent on this theme comments:

You know, if you're in a group and someone is speaking and then looks at you for some kind of response you have to be ready with a response – you can't just say, "I'm sorry, I wasn't listening to you." That would be awful if someone did that to me so I'd try not to do it to someone else. I mean, it's common courtesy to try to listen in a group or when you're speaking to a person – but of course, some kids can't think like that and they find it impossible to think, 'I need to be involved in this group discussion because I'm part of the group', so perhaps that's a very adult response. I just don't know. It depends on the child, the situation, how comfortable they feel, how motivated, what their purpose is – so much.

Teacher 1



In this extract the teacher also acknowledges that assuming such responsibility, and adopting and sustaining such engagement may prove difficult, if not impossible for some pupils if they are unable to identify with the group and its purposes.

In response to questions about what constituted effective group behaviours the teachers had no difficulty at all in providing criteria. The following response is typical of those offered:

Really good group members operate really well within the group discussions. Careful of others in the group – sensitive to others' feelings – encouraging – listening to what others had to say – good non-verbal body-language – good at gathering ideas from the discussion and reporting back. Know the rules of good group discussion.

Teacher 2

As was the case with all teacher participants, this teacher highlighted the importance of awareness of, and an ability to engage in, behaviours within groups which were socially acceptable. The positive impact of social interaction on pupils' learning was not lost on this participant:

When they're working in groups and I'm seeing how well they listen, I'm always emphasising to them that it's not louder that makes the point, so I try – all the time I try to encourage them to do that – to listen to each other whatever it might be that they're talking about because I think they learn far more from each other in that way.

Teacher 2

Most teachers discussed the difficulties they experienced in trying to get pupils to engage in classroom transactions in the ways described above. Some highlighted pupil behaviour – poor behaviour in groups – and lack of awareness of the rules of group interaction as the reasons for the breakdown of transactions:

There's the kids who are so desperate to get in that what they actually say and do becomes daft – or even worse, irrelevant. They want to play the game but can't seem to grasp the rules at all.

Teacher 4

Others believed that group members failed to challenge poor group behaviours from others, and because of this some pupils – and adults – continue to behave in unacceptable ways:

The message is that what you've got to say isn't worth listening to or you aren't worth listening to, which is even worse. And I absolutely hate it when people don't let others finish – interrupt all the time – and get away with it because we're too polite to say, "Excuse me I'm not finished yet." We don't do that, do we, because we're too polite and we don't want to create bad feeling? So they get away with it.

Teacher 3

Several teachers recognised that, in order to achieve the acceptable behaviours which would result in effective group interactions, they might not only have to assume more authority but also ask pupils to behave in another way.

It's a way of behaving and a way of listening

Teacher 7

I suppose it is quite difficult because you're trying to sort of get them to listen to each other but they're so self-absorbed that they don't want to listen to anybody else, so you're having to get past their personalities and who they want to be which is actually quite difficult because, you know, I wouldn't like somebody to be telling me, "This is – ", "I want you to behave like this now instead of like the way you want to be", so you're kind of batting against who they want to be at that time.

Teacher 5

The teachers did not underestimate the challenges they faced in requiring many pupils to rethink the nature of their interactions with other pupils, and to behave in different and more productive ways. From some pupils this would

require a considerable shift in how they perceived themselves and their role within group transactions. For some teachers the demands of trying to achieve this were perceived to be significant:

Like what I was saying before about wanting, you know, wanting them to change who they are so they're quiet and they listen and they respond to it and they're not self-obsessed and won't listen to anybody else. You'll be having to combat all these sorts of things that are going on. As well that you're trying to sort of either squash down or ignore or control or whatever, and concentration, why they are doing it, who they're doing it for. I mean it's endless.

Teacher 5

The benefits of achieving engaged, responsive listening, however, were clearly endorsed by all participants.

### *Listening and social relationships*

In responding to a question concerning the demands placed on pupils when they are engaged in social transactions, one teacher reveals her own anxieties and she reflects on her own experience of engaging in the interview:

There's worries going on in our heads when we're listening – I mean, I'm experiencing it at the moment because I'm trying to understand what you're saying to me plus I'm trying to understand what you want from me.

Teacher 7

Despite her anxiety, this teacher is 'buying in' to her responsibilities within the interaction with the effort she is making to understand and to respond appropriately. She is alert to both the demands of the interview and to the needs of the interviewer. Such awareness of her own response to the situation has resulted in a sensitivity to the demands that such interactions place on pupils and to the negative emotional and affective feelings which may be engendered. It is important to note that, of the ten teachers engaged in the

present study, this participant appeared at certain times to be experiencing the highest levels of anxiety, and had most difficulty in moving away from her previous relationship with the interviewer which was that of student/tutor. In other words, despite the best efforts of the interviewer, there was a perceived imbalance in authority and status.

All participants were clearly aware that listening is firmly embedded within social relationships and several noted that the nature and quality of these relationships were significant factors in determining the quality of listening:

It's important who we're listening to as well. We probably listen better when we really respect someone, or really care about them. I watch kids when they're getting a row and you can actually see them switching off.

Teacher 1

This theme of an improved quality of listening when the speaker is respected or if it is someone the listener cares about emerged in several interviews. Interestingly, when exploring similar issues with pupils, what emerged almost unanimously in their accounts as the main factor influencing the quality of their listening was the nature of the *personal* relationships they had with friends.

### *Teacher authority and responsibilities*

The teachers were aware of the perceived power relationship within classrooms, but they recognised that with authority came responsibilities. All ten teachers, in different ways, indicated that they considered one of their responsibilities in the classroom was to require pupils to behave in appropriately attentive ways. They acknowledged, however, the importance of ensuring that, when exercising such authority with regard to pupils' listening, they remained alert to the dangers of abusing it. Teacher 7's comment captures this idea succinctly:

You listen to your mum, you listen to your dad, you listen to the teachers so they're well trained if you know what I mean. That's their role within the class. That's again very familiar, but it's also vitally important not to abuse that – when I say abuse it, I mean because they have to eventually detach from this figure at the front commanding and leading and whatever and develop these skills themselves and that's where the groups are more [important] – there has to be a context when listening to a teacher is the focus, but there also has to be a context for them listening to themselves.

Teacher 7

Emerging clearly from this extract is the teacher's perception that her role in supporting pupils' listening should be one in which she encourages them gradually to detach from her and move towards a situation whereby they assume more responsibility for their own listening. Teacher responsibility in engaging and sustaining pupils' attention by offering interesting and motivating tasks was recognised in the majority of the interviews. On this theme Teacher 1 comments:

They're bored, I haven't interested them enough to make them want to listen to what I'm doing and put in the effort – to pay enough attention – to actually commit to what's happening. Engage their brains and their ears if you see what I mean. And they can do it if they want to – they just have to want to – well, most of them anyway. If something comes on the TV, or something happens in the classroom that really interests them they can certainly up the ante with their listening and it's not really a problem for them. They're just motivated enough to try.

Teacher 1

This teacher suggests that lack of interest and motivation, rather than any inherent deficit in listening competence, is what causes loss of attention and focus, and she accepts her own responsibilities in ensuring that pupils are engaged enough to 'up the ante'. Her view of listening implies that while pupils are in control of the amount of effort they are prepared to put in, teachers are in control of ensuring that what they are offering is interesting enough to make pupils want 'to commit'. In a similar, but slightly different vein, another



participant draws parallels between her own response when listening tasks are uninteresting and that of her pupils:

I try to make what I'm doing interesting for them because it's much more likely that they'll listen and get something out of it if the work's interesting. Kids are just like us really. If we go to in-service and it's awful and it's clear that the same old OHTs have been pulled out for the umpteenth time, we aren't really likely to engage with it are we and I usually feel resentful that I've to sit and listen to someone who hasn't made an effort to prepare well to be interesting. So I don't engage. Kids do the same. You need to get their attention and make them want to listen to you. It's hard. Not just to get it but to keep it.

Teacher 3

What emerges once again is the affective response on the part of the listener, and the impact that negative responses have on the amount of effort that he or she is willing to invest in a task. Teacher responsibility, not only in ensuring that listening tasks are interesting and motivating, but that instructions given to pupils were clear is highlighted in several accounts:

I think that's one of the first things to go in a lesson – is taking time to give very clear instructions, which is obviously very important, but if you're rushing at the end of the lesson, for whatever reason, obviously you shouldn't but, you know, we're human and other things are happening. I think if they are not – they can get them if they're absolutely clear, but sometimes we just think things are clear.

Teacher 8

The importance of finding mechanisms to ensure teacher clarity is emphasised in the preceding extract. On a slightly different note, Teacher 10 recognises that on certain occasions teachers' messages may not be communicating what they had intended and she recognises teachers' responsibility in the breakdown of certain interactions:

The messages coming from the teacher are quite different – quite, I mean, different from what they mean. "You're not doing what I



wanted you to do", which might not have anything to do with the pupil's actual listening.

Teacher 10

Teachers accepting their responsibilities in providing interesting and motivating listening tasks; ensuring that instructions are communicated with clarity and accuracy; and being willing to acknowledge their own shortcomings in any (or all) of these areas was viewed as essential to an improvement in the quality of transactions within classrooms. Teacher 10 on this theme concludes:

And I mean, if the teacher really put his or her hand on heart and said, "I'm sorry, I haven't interested you in the last ten minutes. That's why you're not listening." But that's often what it is.

Teacher 10

Several of the teachers recognised that it might be of benefit to pupils' listening were they to have a 'voice' in evaluating the quality of the listening curriculum offered to them and in determining, to some extent, what could – and should – be a feature of future listening activities:

Just to allow the pupil the chance to come back and say, "Well, had it been more interesting I would have listened better", or whatever, but to be more conscious that we share this classroom environment, that we, that the teacher has a responsibility to try and, as it were, 'up the text, improve the text'. And that this can be discussed. It takes a mighty lot of courage to do it that way.

Teacher 8

This teacher acknowledges clearly both the pupils' rights to express their opinions and the teacher's courage were he or she to allow and encourage the expression of these opinions. Such an approach, though fraught with possible difficulties, could have enormous benefits if it resulted in an interactional order within the classroom which was genuinely more open.

## *Pupil responsibilities*

The preceding section has examined the teachers' views of the rights that pupils have within classrooms. In the following paragraphs an account will be offered of what these participants considered to be the responsibilities that pupils themselves had for the success of their listening. All of the teachers agreed that it was the responsibility of the pupil to adopt an appropriately attentive mind set within different listening contexts, though most recognised that for a number of reasons some pupils found this difficult. Most articulated these views in terms of the nature and quality of pupil effort, and their ability – or lack of ability – to sustain such attention. On this topic Teacher 1 observes that:

Yes, a listener can do that, can think, 'I'm going to make a bit of an effort here', even though they're not too interested. Or they can tune in again when they find they've lost concentration and the thing's moved on and pick it up. That's good listening, I think. But I think children find it much harder to do that – they don't find it easy to decide to listen to something that simply doesn't interest them. The motivation isn't there, and they're not socialised in the way many adults are to do it because it's the thing to do or it's polite or they just know they should.

Teacher 1

Rather than simply viewing an increase in the quality of listening in terms of increased cognitive activity, this participant focuses on the social obligations of the listener to decide to act in an appropriately attentive manner. Even if they are not interested in the subject matter, or if they lose concentration and have to make a conscious effort to use different strategies to 'pick it up' again (i.e. the gist or meaning contained in a text or message), many adults will recognise their social and moral obligations to make an effort. Some pupils, however, on certain occasions, appear to have difficulty in deciding that it is worth the effort to be a 'good listener'. Teacher 3 picks up on this theme of the sheer effort that many listeners have to make to remain alert and attentive:

I mean, it's hard work to keep focussed and listen for any length of time so we're asking a lot from them – to keep on with it.

Teacher 3

She describes her strategies for 'keeping them on their toes'. Interestingly, this teacher notes that while it can appear to be the case that attention has wandered, some pupils are adept at giving out the wrong signals and can respond accurately to questions posed:

Some can look as if they're miles away and I ask them a question and they can answer it – they do that to try to catch me out.

Teacher 3

Making the same point in a slightly different way, another teacher comments:

They've been listening, but just not showing all the signs that they're listening to you. So the signs are not always correct are they, we make mistakes. They learn to look as if they're listening but they can also learn to look as if they're not listening when they actually are.

Teacher 1

The difficulties of 'reading' and interpreting accurately any social situation are captured neatly in the preceding extract. Despite that fact that these pupils were failing to display the usual non-verbal behaviours associated with attentive, focused listening, it clearly would have been a mistake to infer that they were not listening or did not understand the demands of the task or text.

### *Social identity and control in the classroom*

In discussing pupils' social identities within classrooms, some concerns were expressed concerning the extent to which their listening was being mediated through the teacher at the expense of direct engagement with their peers. Such mediation was viewed as detrimental to the development of pupils' listening, to

their social interactions with peers, and to their identities within classrooms. In exploring this idea, Teacher 9 concludes:

It seems to be very much they feel that I am the person they have to listen to. We probably reinforce that, rather than they could listen to what one of their peers had said in response to me and respond directly back to that person – it's very much through me, as a filter, and we talked about that before, but that might be something to sort of consider.

Teacher 9

This extract reveals that although the teacher acknowledges that the kinds of social transactions described here are likely to be prevalent in many classrooms they are, paradoxically, of the kinds least likely to encourage effective peer interaction. In contrast, another participant described a situation with pupils in her own classroom in which pupils had established social identities within peer groups from which teachers – and at times other pupils – were excluded:

Teenagers are very skilled at all of this, they are really excellent communicators in all sorts of ways. The messages are often loud and clear without a word being exchanged. They have these exclusive little groups and sometimes it's just me that's excluded but sometimes other kids are as well and there are three or four little groups and they all have their own agendas in the room and much of it has absolutely nothing [in common] with what I want them to do. They're listening to each other and the messages are coming across loud and clear.

Teacher 3

Teacher 3 recognises the skill with which many young people listen to and communicate with one another, often non-verbally, and just how powerfully exclusive some peer groups can be. In strong contrast to Teacher 9's anxiety, expressed earlier in this section with regard to possible difficulties associated with too much control, Teacher 3 is concerned with a situation in which teacher control is limited, at best, and simply missing at worst.

## Summary

In Chapter 2 a detailed review was offered of the ways in which pupils' development in literacy is influenced and shaped by their social (and cultural) identities. The preceding teacher accounts – and those of the pupils which will be analysed in Chapter 6 – demonstrate that listening, and its relationship to social identity, emerged as a powerful theme. The ways in which pupils' listening practices in classrooms may be influenced and shaped by social identities will be explored in Chapter 7.

This Chapter began by discussing the different ways in which teacher participants talked about and specifically represented listening. The focus then shifted to their accounts of the wide range of activities they engaged in to support and 'scaffold' their pupils' listening. In presenting these findings, to ensure that the scale and complexity of these activities were communicated clearly, the researcher drew on the observational studies which formed part of the wider research project. An account was then offered of the ways in which the teachers helped pupils to frame their listening within specific genres; and the importance these teachers placed on awareness of features of different genres to pupils' ability to monitor and control their listening was highlighted. The Chapter concluded by drawing a clear distinction between the intellectual cognitive demands placed on pupils when they were listening to different genres of texts within different contexts and for different purposes, and the social cognitive and normative demands placed on pupils' listening as they engaged in listening within the social context of the classroom. In the following Chapter an analysis will be offered of the pupils' interviews and, where significant, parallels with, and contrasts to, the teachers' accounts will be highlighted.

## Introduction

In this chapter an account is provided of the findings from the interviews with the forty pupils who participated in the study. It has been noted in the Methodology chapter (Chapter 4) that the pupil sample was drawn by teacher nomination of two 'good' listeners and two 'less successful' listeners (i.e. four pupils from each of the ten classes), and that these pupils were also the focus of particular attention during the observational study which formed part of the wider research project. In reporting on the findings from the interviews, in order to provide as full and detailed a picture as possible of the complexity of the picture which emerged, information from the observations, where appropriate, will be drawn upon to illuminate, clarify and, in places, contrast with the pupils' accounts.

It will be recalled that the interviews with the pupils were designed to:

- explore pupils' general knowledge of and beliefs about listening, often by inviting them to reflect on particular episodes, and
- allow very specific questions to be posed concerning the lessons that had been observed.

The chapter begins by providing an account of the different ways in which pupils represented listening in different contexts. The focus then shifts to pupils' perceptions of the demands placed on their listening associated with different genres of texts and communicative purposes, and of the ways in which teachers scaffold their listening. The demands placed on pupils in their role as listeners and participants in classroom interactions are then discussed, and their ability to 'read' such social transactions is explored. The chapter concludes by



analysing pupils' perceptions of their ability to monitor and control their listening depending on the genres of texts and the social contexts within which listening occurs.

### **Pupils' representations of listening**

It was surprising to note just how many pupils were able to use the language of cognitive psychology and individual cognitive processing when discussing their own listening processes and practices. While some pupils indicated that they had been explicitly taught this by their teachers when discussing listening (and such teaching had indeed been observed) others had received no direct instruction. It is possible, therefore, that the latter group had perhaps acquired access to and control of such terminology through regular access to the media (both print and non-print) where particular psychological concepts and terms have become part of everyday 'popular' cultural exchanges. More than two thirds of participants highlighted the importance to effective listening of focussing on the text or message, and of attentiveness and concentration (though each of the three terms were used interchangeably to represent the same element in the process). Being able to hear and understand messages were identified by more than half of the pupils as crucial factors in determining the success of any listening activity. When discussing the strategies he uses to ensure understanding, Pupil 11 notes:

I keep trying to understand – to follow them, what they're saying – and I keep trying to pay attention – and I think to myself, 'Do I agree with what they're saying?' 'What do I actually think about all that?'. 'Is this person making sense to me?' 'Is this person worth listening to?' Because sometimes people talk a lot of rubbish and I just think it isn't worth listening to at all really.

Pupil 11

In discussing his own listening performance this pupil describes how he attempts to monitor his understanding by actively interpreting, asking himself questions to establish the extent to which the message is making sense to him, and by evaluating both the quality of the contribution of the speaker and his or her credibility. His goal here is to arrive at an informed personal stance. Clearly, there is a high degree of both cognitive – and also metacognitive – activity occurring while this participant endeavours to understand.

The demands on memory featured in several accounts. In this sophisticated account of his actions in determining the meaning of new and unfamiliar words, Pupil 25 describes how he listens for the context within which they are embedded, and draws on his memory of the meanings of more familiar words to help him arrive at an understanding. His cognitive effort in listening for understanding is high, and he is also demonstrating clearly that he is able to make effective use of different metacognitive strategies:

Well when it sort of – you get words, quite complicated ones that you don't know. I try and remember the words that were around it, that's what I like to do the first time I listen to something, and when you get the words that were around it I sort of understand it, so that's me trying to think about it. Sometimes I miss it, but –  
Pupil 25

Motivation to engage with the listening task or activity, and to sustain engagement, was discussed by several participants and, particularly when considering their roles in group and class interactions, most pupils recognised the importance of an appropriate verbal or non-verbal response. Several of these ideas are captured in the following exchange:

Interviewer:                    So Katy, can you try to tell me what goes on inside your head when you're listening? What are you thinking? What are you doing?

Pupil:                                I think that I understand what's – what I'm listening to and it's sinking in. I concentrate on it. If it's a

tape I just stare ahead or shut my eyes to keep the attention going. If it's in the group I keep looking at the person who's speaking and think about it, so I have something to say back to them at the end when they're finished. I don't interrupt them. And I sometimes ask questions or say, "Is what you mean –" to make sure I've got it right. I don't let my mind wander away to other things 'cause it's a bit – sometimes it's hard if you've missed something and then someone says, "Katy, what do you think?" and you don't know what to say because you haven't been paying attention to what the other person has said.

Pupil 22

In this extract the pupil highlights her intention to listen, to interpret and to make an informed response. She describes her attempts to focus attention – both mentally and physically – and to adopt and sustain an attentive mind set. The active nature of her listening is communicated clearly. In a similar vein, Pupil 1 demonstrates active listening as he endeavours to concentrate on the speaker and block out distractions:

Don't concentrate on anything else but the person that you're speaking to, or is speaking to you, and try – if someone else is speaking, try not to listen to it, and see if you can block them out and listen to the one person.

Pupil 1

His very focused attention as he attempts to block out distractions reveals his explicit agenda in attempting to listen well. In describing her efforts to repair gaps in her listening and understanding caused by distractions, Pupil 5 conveys clearly her intention to listen more effectively by increasing her efforts in concentration, even when her interest levels are not high; in her own words, she determines to 'concentrate harder':

Pupil: In my head. I think that I'm really going to try to pay attention and – sometimes I get a bit distracted and I miss bits and find it hard to work out what it means because I've missed a bit. I concentrate harder – and – and

Interviewer: And?

Pupil: I just work at it harder – and focus more – and shut out everything else from my mind if I can – and – even if I'm maybe not that interested I try to make myself keep paying attention –

Interviewer: So it's easier if you're interested? The listening?

Pupil: Yes it is.

Pupil 5

It is interesting to note that this pupil sees a direct relationship between increase in effort and increase in the quality of her listening. When asked about the factors which can prevent effective listening few experienced any difficulties in responding. All noted some external factors; most recognised that internal factors could exercise a significant influence over the quality of their listening, their motivation to listen and their ability to sustain listening. The many factors that can impede listening – both cognitive and affective – are described in the following extract:

Noise. Distractions – mucking about. And the cold – our English class is in the huts and it's freezing in the winter and just roasting in the summer. If it's boring – if it's too hard stuff for you – and you can't understand it all and you think, 'This is a load of rubbish and a waste of time.' You need to be in the mood for it. If you've had a fight with your pal or your mum and dad it's hard to keep your mind on the work, because it's just full of the argument or the problem.

Pupil 33

This pupil is aware of the factors which can prevent her from listening well: external factors (e.g. noise; the behaviour of others; interest generated by the materials); external environmental features (e.g. temperature); internal affective factors (e.g. mood and feelings); and cognitive factors (e.g. perceived difficulty of task or materials).

The preceding paragraphs have demonstrated the extent to which many pupils were able to draw fairly confidently on the language of cognitive psychology in their representations of listening. Others moved more naturally – and instinctively – towards representations of listening which were embedded within their discussions of texts, contexts, and purposes for listening and the wider social contexts of their classrooms, and they tended to use the discourses associated with genres of texts and the communicative contexts within which transactions occurred. (Genre is discussed fully in the following section.) Depending on the questions asked, however, some participants were able to move confidently between the discourses of psychology and those of social and cultural contexts. It is of interest to note that, in response to questions about their recollections of situations when their *most effective* listening occurred, few discussed classroom contexts; rather, the majority indicated that they listened most effectively when engaged in social (and often therapeutic) transactions with friends.

### **The demands of different genres of texts and teacher scaffolding of listening**

What emerged clearly from the teachers' accounts and from the observational study reported on in Chapter 4 was the care that had been taken to scaffold pupils' listening by alerting them to the deeper structures of different genres of texts and by cueing them into their main features. In other words, the teachers had made available to their pupils a set of resources with which they could frame their listening in ways that were *appropriate to the demands of schools*. The teachers provided an appropriate metalanguage with which pupils could talk about and discuss the genre markers of the different forms, and they devised interesting, imaginative and thoughtful tasks which allowed for a considerable degree of interactive engagement.

In analysing the pupils' accounts, and in observing their classroom activities, a key question for consideration was the extent to which there had been a sharing of perspective. Did these teachers and pupils construe the nature of listening in the same way? From evidence gathered in the pupil interviews and the observations it is clear that these teachers had succeeded in realising their aims. A significant majority of pupils was well aware of the fact that different texts made different levels of demands on their listening; that they adjusted their listening depending on the genre of the text; and that purpose and context for listening both had an impact on the nature and quality of listening.

### *Listening for underlying structure and genre features of texts*

Many of the pupil participants articulated clearly the ways in which they framed their listening to focus on the underlying structure of a text, and how prior knowledge of such structures helped them to achieve this. Most could discuss the specific techniques used in texts they were listening to – and watching – and several could engage in impressive analysis and evaluation of such techniques. In the following extract Pupil 3 reflects on his own listening during a task in which he had been asked to compare and contrast the techniques used in two different speeches: the first was Martin Luther King's famous *I Have A Dream* speech and the second was made by a black lawyer in defence of his client – another lawyer who had been sacked when his employers discovered that he was HIV positive – in the film *Philadelphia*. The irony of the black lawyer's initial reluctance to accept the case and defend his client's right to work without prejudice was not lost on this pupil:

I usually just watch films and don't think too much about how it's done. But she wanted us to think about how it was done and listen to that. So I did that and I paid attention. Martin Luther King used all the things that the lawyer used to get his message across but his was a speech – but the lawyer was from a film – for entertainment – Martin Luther King wasn't for entertainment, it was really serious stuff – but the film was entertainment and



serious as well. So I was looking at what they said and how they said it in all of them.

Pupil 3

This pupil describes how he attempts to adjust his listening to meet the demands of the texts and of the purposes set by the teacher: "she wanted us to think about how it was done and listen to that". Not only was he able to focus on the underlying structure of each of the texts, he was also able to distinguish between the multiple institutional purposes of the film-makers (i.e. the fictional film is for entertainment, but also seeks to explore serious themes) and Martin Luther King's purpose which is a serious, real-life plea for equal rights. He is also aware that as well as differentiating his own listening depending on the structure of each text, he also differentiated according to the different techniques that were being used:

So there was more in the speeches than just the – ideas – we need to – need to look at – how they said it and the techniques – and most of the time both are important. I listened in the same way and in different ways when I was listening for the different things – same for the things they were saying, but different for the techniques – I think.

Pupil 3

Another pupil, in discussing the same lesson, experienced little difficulty in identifying the persuasive rhetorical techniques used:

The quality of speakers, because – because they all used different ways to get the message across. Martin Luther King delivers a speech. Um. It's kind of – Miss H wants us to see that it's a good speech, a very good speech. And then – and we listen to that. 'Cause it can stimulate you, because then he projects his voice at you, he's powerful. He repeats things and uses his tone to grab you. You might go, 'Yeah, right' and listen. He used his body language. He was quiet then loud and then very quiet again and you had to work to listen. I mean that's what I think. Everyone got his attention during that and he had control of them, you could see that.

Pupil 4

Pupil 1's account reveals the extent to which he had assimilated the metalanguage required for discussing the texts he was watching and listening to; his awareness of how his teacher has scaffolded his listening and alerted him to the ways in which the demands of audience inform and shape form, content and the language of texts is clearly conveyed:

It was the tone, repetition, the language and mood and audience and things like that. They were the five main things that we did in all of them. And we answered questions about that and what age group they were aimed at and how that affected how they spoke, did they make it easier for younger people to understand, or did they make it with all big words and that that kids probably wouldn't understand and that was able to get more information across for like adults and everything.

Pupil 1

What is of particular interest is that although Pupils 3 and 4 – from whose accounts extracts have been given above – had been nominated by their teacher as 'less successful' listeners, both performed well during the listening activities observed in class and, as has been demonstrated, both were confident and articulate during their interviews and offered well-judged responses to the questions posed. It is significant to note that from the twenty pupils identified as 'less successful' listeners, ten actually performed well on the listening tasks and during their interviews. This is an important point. It reveals tensions in teachers' expectations of what constitutes 'good listening' in classrooms, and between the summative judgements concerning children's abilities (which were required for identification of 'good' and 'less successful' listeners) and the diagnostic and formative judgements made when teachers evaluated how pupils had coped with the listening activities. This will be explored in Chapter 7.

Almost all pupils recognised the importance of being able to identify the genre of the text they were listening to, and the fact that such knowledge allowed them to frame their listening accordingly. In the following quotation the pupil

explains how familiarity with the structure and genre features of imaginative fiction establishes his expectations of what is to come, and he notes how the presence or absence of such 'templates' to guide listening activity has a significant impact on the nature and quality of his listening:

Pupil:           Like with the story, you just know what stories are like. With the facts – well, you know sometimes but sometimes there are no clues, so it just all sort of comes at you and – it's hard to listen and make sense. You're trying to sort out what it is and you just can't seem to get it right.

Interviewer:   And if you could sort out what it was would that help you to listen better?

Pupil:           Yes. It would. 'Cause then you could think, 'This is a story'. 'This is something with lots of information'. 'This is a – an argument so different points of view, like with writing an argument', so you'd know exactly what to – exactly how to listen.

Pupil 26

This response also demonstrates the pupil's metacognitive knowledge of both the demands of the task, and of himself as a learner, as he describes his attempts to monitor and control his understanding. Metacognition, and pupils' awareness of and ability to consciously control their listening, will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

### *Cueing pupils in to genre markers*

Not only were most pupils able to discuss the distinctive features of the different forms, they were also alert to the ways in which teachers scaffolded their listening by cueing them into the genre markers and establishing clear purposes for listening. The following extract offers a detailed account from one pupil of a series of listening tasks and demonstrates her awareness of the need to be alert to such markers:

Well, the first one – we were to listen for – to *Little Red Riding Hood*, the story, and see how the story was different from the tape version – that was the poem and see how it had been changed. We had to do that in groups and discuss it and see what the differences were. So the listening – well, the group work was listening, listening to each other, and listening to see – to see if we could see – hear the difference between the story and the poem – and see – hear what the – things were that told us if it was a story or a poem.

Pupil 21

In preparation for this series of lessons the teacher began by activating the pupils' prior knowledge of the underlying structures and genre markers of fairy tales, poems, plays, soap operas, *Crimewatch* (a television news programme), horror stories, and melodramas, and she ensured that any gaps in their knowledge were filled. Subsequent tasks, using both audiotapes and videotapes, then asked pupils to identify similarities and differences in form and content as the familiar fairy story of *Little Red Riding Hood* was transformed into different genres. Familiarising pupils with a range of genres in this way, and then cueing them into their listening tasks, allowed pupils to adapt their listening once the text was recognised to be within a particular genre frame. Pupil 21, when discussing how she framed her listening, notes:

I wasn't expecting the poem – but as soon as I realised that it was the same story – well, nearly the same story but in a different – genre – I just changed my listening to – to listen to a poem rather than a story. Your brain sort of thinks, 'This is a poem', – so you know what to expect. This is a story – so you know. It was all *Little Red Riding Hood* so I knew what was coming.

Pupil 21

Expectations had clearly been set up by this pupil, who then listened carefully until she had identified the particular genre to which she had been listening. She had 'templates' in her head, and it appeared that she could move readily from one to another until she could confirm, to her own satisfaction, the genre of the text. In discussing a lesson in which they had to listen to, and with some texts both listen and watch, a series of short texts or extracts from texts, and (a)

identify the genre of the text, and (b) explain how (and how quickly) they knew, one participant described how he had tackled the task:

Pupil: I knew some of them right away, they were really easy. There was the poem, the news, the weather (report) – the story, and the play, and...

Interviewer: And how did you know what kind of text you were listening to?

Pupil: Well, you – we've had lots of them so we're really used to them. So I know poems and stories and plays and stuff like that. But the ad(vert) was harder 'cause it took – because first it was like a story but then you knew that it was really selling you something.

Pupil 35

This response demonstrates the pupil's awareness of the fact that some texts do not fall neatly into one particular genre or another; rather, as was the case with the advertisement he was referring to, some confuse the listener by blending one or more genres into the same text. This advertisement began with a strong narrative element and then moved subtly – and seamlessly – into the kind of persuasive text used to promote and sell products. In this case the advertisement was one from the now famous *Nescafé* range, in which the interest of the audience is engaged in the 'story' and the 'characters' as well as in the product. The teacher's rationale for including this text – and several other in which the genre boundaries were blurred – was convincing: she wanted to help pupils to identify the different structures and features of texts; to be aware that particular texts can have more than one genre embedded within them; and to recognise that writers, filmmakers and advertisers choose to subvert genres or blend them together depending on their own purposes and audiences for such texts. In setting up the activity and cueing pupils in, she did not alert them to the fact that some of the texts did not fit neatly into one genre or another. She wanted to see what they would be able to achieve with the knowledge they already possessed. Pupil 35 quickly came to recognise the dual purpose of the advertisement: it was constructed both to entertain him and to sell him

something. Familiarity with the features of the genres helped him to determine these purposes.

### *Narrative pull*

When asked questions concerning the demands associated with the different genres of texts, teacher participants almost unanimously indicated that they believed pupils would experience fewer problems with imaginative fiction because of their strong narratives. In response to the same question many pupil participants, though not all, stated that they found it easier to listen to imaginative fiction than to non-fiction texts. Many different reasons were offered for this response. Pupil 32 drew on her understanding of media texts to formulate her answer, and constructed a powerful extended metaphor in an attempt to capture the idea of the 'narrative pull' that a fictional narrative could exert over a listener. The following short extract from her account reveals her belief in the power of narrative to carry the listener along:

Interviewer: Right. And do you feel the same way when you're listening to a story – a short story or a novel?

Pupil: No, not really. That's easier, I think.

Interviewer: Can you try to tell me why it is easier?

Pupil: Mr M teaches Media as well, and he's been telling us about flow – you know what that is? So there's flow in stories and so it makes it easier to listen to – you know, like a river with a current, you just get taken along with the flow. It's powerful.

Pupil 32

One pupil responded to this question simply in terms of the sheer pleasure he gains from relaxing and listening to a story:

I get pleasure out of it. I get pleasure out of listening to stories and listening to what people have written and so I'll



automatically get laid back and enjoy it rather than take it seriously. I just take it as it comes and enjoy it rather than trying to question it, so I ultimately just lay back.

Pupil 12

Another participant discussed the pleasure he gained from allowing himself to become drawn into the world of the narrative and 'feel' what is happening. His affective response is communicated in terms of the pleasure he derives from the listening experience:

I really enjoy listening to stories because you can get involved and feel what's happening. You can get involved and kind of lost into another world.

Pupil 22

This idea of being drawn into stories, allowing them to exert their 'pull', and empathising with the characters and their predicaments is captured in the following extract where the pupil's familiarity with the narrative features of conflict and resolution are expressed with wry humour:

We just tune into the story and let ourselves go into it. You wait for the next thing that's going to happen to the characters and think, 'How are they going to get themselves out of that, I wonder?'

Pupil 4

The power of the story to grasp and hold on to attention, to involve the listener in the narrative to the extent that she is predicting what will happen next, was discussed at some length by Pupil 21. This participant's comments throughout this part of her interview demonstrated a secure understanding of the pleasures of 'escaping' into a fictional world and simply allowing herself to become involved in the lives of the characters, to care about what happens to them, while at the same time recognising that the story will reach some kind of satisfactory ending. Several of these ideas are expressed in the following quotation:

Yes, because with the story you – get involved in the – the story, the plot, and you want to know what happens next so you don't have to try so hard to listen. You just sort out at the beginning what's happening in the story and then you listen – I mean, sometimes you think – you think, 'She's going to get arrested or something', and you – you listen to see if you're right or wrong. So you're involved in the story – well, not involved exactly – you know what I mean?

Pupil 21

Pupil 26 articulates his response in terms of the effort required from his listening, and his long experience of, and familiarity with, story patterns and structures from an early age. This pupil's ideas resonate with those of the teachers; he discusses the fact that for many pupils their experiences of learning to read, and of being read to by teachers and parents, were dominated by frequent exposure to fictional texts rather than non-fiction texts. As a result of this he feels far more confident in his ability to listen to fiction rather than to the different kinds of non-fiction:

I just don't have to try so hard with stories and things like that because – because, well I sort of know stories better in a way – I mean, we've always read stories at school and we read them in nursery and Primary all the time, and my mum has always read me lots of stories and bought me those – you know – the story tapes – so I just know them much better so I don't have to try so hard – but some of the passages for the information you don't really know them so you don't just know what to expect.

Pupil 26

### **Listening in the social contexts of classrooms**

The previous section has drawn attention to pupils' awareness of the different cognitive demands placed on them during listening tasks, but the interviews and observations also revealed that pupils were alert to the sociocognitive demands that were placed on them within classroom contexts. A majority of participants discussed the specific demands that were made within social

interactions, particularly, but by no means only, within small group discussions. Pupil 37, for example, commented on how he perceived his own role within a group discussion where he was also required to act as the chairperson and reporter:

Pupil: It's quite hard, you know, because you've got to listen to everyone and get them to listen to each other – and that the quiet ones have their say and the – and you get to put in your own ideas and get to the report back point and have something to report.

Interviewer: And is it harder having to be a group member and do these other things as well?

Pupil: Yes, it is, 'cause you've got to keep everybody happy and make sure they all get their say. And that's not always easy so you've got to – you've got to keep on your toes if it's going to work.

Pupil 37

This participant has competing demands being made on him within this transaction. He is 'reading' the interaction in his role as chairperson and remaining alert to the feelings of others within the group to make sure that his own contribution is appropriate and that he is able to report back the views of others accurately.

Just as the teachers appreciated that listening is embedded within social relationships and that the *quality* of listening depended on listeners' relationships with speakers, so the pupils recognised that their listening was qualitatively different when listening to friends, or to someone they cared about. Such transactions occurred either within friendship groups within school or, significantly, in the kinds of therapeutic listening which characterised many of their reported social interactions outwith school. The willingness to engage readily with friends, without fear of 'losing face' is captured neatly in the following extract where the pupil discusses how good and mutually supportive relationships can often result in positive and constructive interactions:

But it doesn't really matter if you get things wrong or if you say, "I don't really understand that", because you're with friends usually and they won't make a fool of you. They know how you are and how you feel, so they accept you and they know your moods and you know theirs so mostly we get on with it OK.

Pupil 1

The supportive role of friends in encouraging one another to engage in the transaction, and in helping in the communication of ideas was explored during the interview with Pupil 8, who concludes:

But I think that groups can be good as well 'cause you get help from others and you can work together and share ideas and it's easier to say something in front of only four or five people than the whole class in case you're wrong. And your friends help you, you know, to get your ideas across and that's good I think.

Pupil 8

Pupil 8 recognises the value of friendship group interactions in the sharing of ideas and in developing her understanding, but she also comments on the increase in the quantity of her contribution; she is willing to say more. Pupil 22 reveals her perception of herself as a listener who is well aware of her ability to listen in different ways depending on the purpose of, and context for, listening; she also cares enough to empathise with the speaker:

When I'm listening to discussions I do listen to people quite a lot as well as having my own views. Even though I take over quite a lot, I do listen to other people as well. I think I'm good at that and listening to instructions, I am quite good at that. Listening when people are quite upset in their voice, I can listen out for that quite well. I can hear when somebody's upset. A good listener would also be able to hear when people are upset or they would be able to help their friends if they felt down or unhappy or happy. They would be able to join in with the happiness.

Pupil 22

Engaging with the speaker in a helpful, supportive way is acknowledged by this participant to be particularly beneficial in friendship interactions.

### *Norms of listening and pupils' responsibilities*

Most participants experienced little difficulty in describing what they believed to be appropriate listening performance within a group transaction. Many included a range of non-verbal behaviours in their accounts, as well as appropriate verbal responses. Pupil 35 provides a very full account:

They look at me when I'm speaking, they look as if they're listening – you know, an interested expression on the face – pay attention to me – ask questions – not distracted – not trying to butt in, not interrupting when I'm speaking – don't make a fool of me when I'm wrong or say something that's not quite right, and I do that sometimes because I've not really quite understood something – not bored. Or when someone says, "Well Claire said such and such a minute ago", so they've remembered and they can bring it back into the discussion a bit later on. The other Claire does that quite a lot, 'cause she knows me and she knows when I'm not too sure or when – when I can do with some help. Miss G wants us all to speak and sometimes when it's my turn I'm not sure what to say so Claire helps me.

Pupil 35

The preceding extract from Pupil 35's interview reveals her secure understanding of what comprises the accepted norms of effective interactions: sustained eye contact; facial expressions which demonstrate interest in what the speaker is saying; asking relevant questions; not interrupting; not engaging in face-threatening actions; bringing the listener's previous contributions into current discussions; and being able to 'read' the situation and know when, and how, to offer support. Pupils were fully aware, however, of the difficulties that many of their peers experienced in adhering to these norms. Pupil 31 on this theme comments:

Sometimes the groups work OK, but lots of times they don't. Everybody just mucks about and won't even try to get it to work properly. Maybe they're bored or just not that interested, I don't know – but sometimes she's [the teacher] done quite interesting



things so it annoys me when they won't take it seriously and get down to it. I mean, they could do it if they wanted to, but they don't.

Pupil 31

In exploring the reasons for some pupils' lack of engagement this participant highlights several possible reasons – lack of interest, boredom, tasks which fail to engage – but she dismisses them and concludes that their unwillingness to accept responsibility for the interaction and *take it seriously* is the main reason for its failure. She is not, however, suggesting that these pupils have failed to internalise the norms of group interaction, or that they are in any way lacking in the ability to engage with either the task or the process; rather, that they have chosen to reject them and to behave in an inappropriate manner. Pupil 12 describes how he attempts to listen and respond in an appropriate way – in other words to model good group behaviours – to ensure that his own views are treated with respect:

I try to take it seriously so that they'll treat what I say seriously as well.

Pupil 12

Pupil 4's response is representative of the majority; he believes that not only do listeners have an obligation to listen, but that improvements in the quality of listening would result from increased efforts in being appropriately attentive. When discussing the factors which prevent him from listening effectively, and what he could do about it, he concludes:

But in a way you have to stop being distracted 'cause it could be quite important, 'cause if you're at a conference and hear cars hooting you can't let that distract you, that's no excuse. So, you have to just focus really hard on it.

Pupil 4



A willingness to accept personal responsibility for their own listening, and for improving their skills, was expressed in different ways by different pupils. Pupil 5 states quite simply: 'I think I have to get better by myself.'

### *Exploratory talk/exploratory listening*

When discussing the kinds of interactions which took place when they were engaged in listening as part of a group discussion, many of the participants drew on representations which had much in common with Mercer's (1992) concept of *exploratory talk*. The indisputably exploratory nature of many group transactions, witnessed by the researcher throughout the observational part of the study, suggests that these pupils were indeed engaging in interactions within which they were required to arrive at some kind of collaborative understanding, solution or resolution. The quotations below serve to exemplify how the pupils characterised listening within such classroom transactions:

I try to listen to what other people say. It helps you to sort out what you think – to get the answer.

Pupil 22

So to get the true meaning of something you really have to bring other people into a conversation.

Pupil 12

A good listener doesn't just lap up what you're saying and take it as it comes.

Pupil 13

I like working out what it all means – and I like hearing what other people in my group think. And there's no right answer, so long as you back up your answer OK.

Pupil 10

Many participants, when discussing the nature and quality of group interactions, highlighted the benefits of such transactions in helping them to sort out what they actually thought about a particular issue or topic under

discussion. This willingness to approach the task in a genuinely open manner characterised most of the interactions observed by the researcher. Pupils asked questions of one another; sought clarification; hypothesised; paraphrased; synthesised; and challenged and refuted in ways which encouraged exploration of ideas, topics or problems as they were engaged on listening tasks.

The opportunities offered during group transactions to allow the listener to:

- formulate initial, tentative ideas;
- clarify or correct his or her initial understanding;
- gain access to opinions and conclusions which were perhaps different to ones already held or reached by the listener;
- evaluate the ideas of others;
- be engaged in collaborative and collective group effort;
- have immediate opportunities, having heard opinions, to respond in different ways by accepting or rejecting ideas, and
- introduce new ideas to the discussion

were viewed by pupils as particularly beneficial to their understanding as they engaged in discussions with their peers. The idea of sharing ideas and opinions in this mutually supportive way is expressed clearly by Pupil 28:

You can listen or you can try to get involved, like, and say something to the group – and you get to hear other people's ideas and so it's better – and we make decisions when we've discussed something and put all our ideas together and see what we came up with at the end.

Pupil 28

This pupil is aware of the choice she has between *just listening* and *active engagement and involvement* in the discussion, but she believes that a better outcome will ultimately be achieved from a collective group effort and input rather than simply from her own individual listening. The synthesis of ideas 'at the end' is perceived to be the most satisfactory and useful outcome for the transaction.

This need to consider other evidence, and to interpret the quality of the evidence available, was discussed by Pupil 25 following a group activity in which pupils were given information and evidence and were required to make judgements and decisions based on that evidence. This resulted in a heated debate (which was observed by the researcher) in which several conclusions were arrived at, rejected, revisited, and overturned for a second and even third time. In describing both the *process* and the *final outcome*, Pupil 25 commented:

Well, if you're an individual, you just know that no matter what – it's usually your favourite person that stays on and your worst person just gets kicked off and you don't listen to the evidence properly. But when you're working in a group you've got lots of evidence from them as well and people are trying to tell you, "This is a good evidence", where – if you were working individually you would have just said, "No evidence for this person" and you might just think, 'I'm going to kick him out.'

Pupil 25

An ability to move beyond, and overcome, egocentric and prejudiced judgements is highlighted in the preceding quotation as an essential prerequisite for a satisfactory final outcome. Pupil 22 believed that listening to others in exploratory therapeutic interactions would help her to improve, and to acquire and develop new skills. Such skills would, in turn, prevent similar errors from recurring:

Yes, because you need to learn to listen to people because otherwise you're not going to listen to anybody and they need to give you advice. You need to listen to people to give you advice and that's how you develop new skills. Because you need to listen to people because they need to tell you, "That's wrong", so you improve it. You make it right and then you remember that the next time, so you don't make the mistake again, so you need to learn to listen to people in that way.

Pupil 22

Opportunities within discussions to highlight misconceptions and correct 'wrong' answers were explored in several interviews, and the chance to understand the reasons for errors or misjudgements and listen to the thinking and reasoning which had resulted in group members arriving at alternative conclusions, was considered to be invaluable to these participants. An awareness that listeners can move from firmly held opinions towards a recognition that such opinions were, in fact, wrong or erroneous, was revealed by Pupil 4. In the following extract he discusses this idea:

It helps you to sort out what you think yourself – 'cause sometimes if you're dead sure that you're right and then someone else speaks and then you can see that you were wrong all the time and you see why you were wrong and how they got the right answer.

Pupil 4

In his interview Pupil 4 shared examples of several instances of when this had happened to him, and he recognised that he now approached such transactions in a slightly less secure, more tentative fashion. The initial tentative nature of many interactions was discussed by several participants. Here is an extract from Pupil 38's interview where he is reflecting on a group discussion of a poem:

Pupil: I like the groups best 'cause it's easier to let you know what you really think. I mean, you get to hear what everybody else thinks and you can say your bit and you can change your mind as it's going along. So, the groups. Sometimes I haven't got a clue when it starts but as it's going along I get more and more ideas and – people say things and I think, 'Yeah, that's right', or 'No, that's rubbish', but sometimes there's things I've never even thought of. But at the end I've got a better idea and I – I know how we've got there.

Interviewer: And does that help you sort it out when you come to write about the poem yourself?

Pupil: Yes, it does. 'Cause it's poetry and it could mean this and it could mean that and both are OK so long as you

can have your reasons. You get some of the reasons for yourself and other ones from other people and you get to hear why they think this or that – thought that in the first place.

Pupil 38

In this short exchange Pupil 38 reveals an understanding of the fact that discussions can be genuinely *exploratory* as group members grapple with possible interpretations of a poem; offer, defend and reject analyses; and propose alternative readings. Engagement in such a critical and analytical transaction, in the opinion of this pupil, has proved to be particularly beneficial to his own learning, his confidence in arriving at and defending his own opinions, his ability to accept that others do not necessarily agree with him, and in a willingness to recognise that their ideas may actually be better on occasion.

### **Teachers' responsibilities to develop pupils' listening skills**

Although many pupils acknowledged their own roles and responsibilities in improving their skills in listening, most recognised that there was a great deal that teachers could – and should – do to help them. Some recognised that while they had been, and continued to be, taught the skills of reading and writing, and to a lesser extent talking, few could recall being taught to listen. Interesting and motivating tasks; a wide range of texts; engaging topics; varied contexts; different media; explicit purposes for listening; models of good listening behaviours, from teachers and on video examples; and a significant increase in opportunities for, and practice in, listening in English and other curricular areas were highlighted as factors which could help them to improve their listening. In addition, several pupils indicated that changes in both the quantity and quality of interactions with teachers could prove particularly beneficial, with a shift in focus from addressing whole classes to interacting with individuals and small groups:

There isn't actually any contact between the children [and the teachers] so some of our friends don't bother listening – but if all the teachers made sure that they had verbal contact with everybody in class then people realise – I mean they should bother with this thing because otherwise they're not going to know what to do. They want to listen to them because it's going to be interesting or it might have something of interest or it might help me in what I am doing. All teachers who take that extra bit of time to speak to pupils, it will probably make pupils think, 'I should listen all the time, not just when it suits me.' But half the time it's just not done individually. Some teachers are just a bit soft because they go round and they say to everybody, "Now did everybody listen to this?" You should do it tougher like, "I said it already", because some people think, 'I'll muck about while they're saying it and get them over when everybody really knows what they're saying. Just come over here and explain it to me', but one day they're going to get a shock when the teachers say, "No, I'm not going to tell you again, you should have been listening."

Pupil 12

Interestingly, this pupil feels that teachers should be more demanding of pupils in terms of their listening and should be prepared to shift more of the responsibility onto the pupils. The central role of the teacher, indeed, in helping pupils to progress was endorsed by most participants. Many, however, noted that teachers had responsibilities beyond providing interesting and relevant tasks and interacting more frequently with pupils. For example, the following extract from Pupil 13's transcript highlights the teacher's responsibility to ensure that his or her own messages are unambiguous, since pupil understanding is dependent on the quality and clarity of such messages:

You really need to make sure that people understand what you're saying. People don't want to seem stupid and say, "Please Mr Bloggs, I don't understand what you're saying", because they think that everyone will laugh at them and say, "Ha ha, you don't know what you're doing, you're stupid", but they're not stupid, it's just that they don't understand.

Pupil 13



Achieving such clarity will also allow pupils to avoid situations where they are ridiculed by other pupils and are left feeling 'stupid'. Pupil 13 is clearly alert to the need within social contexts to avoid being 'exposed'. Not only should teachers take their responsibilities seriously, they should also *be seen to be doing so*; when pupil/teacher interactions fail because the pupils do not understand teachers' messages, teachers should be prepared to increase their efforts:

Sometimes I wonder why teachers don't do more when they're talking to the children. Sometimes it just seems as if they don't care about how it's going to be done. They seem to think that everybody understands and you sometimes wonder why I said that people just don't listen. Sometimes people genuinely don't understand and teachers just say, "No just forget about it." But the thing is if a child doesn't understand, if they genuinely don't understand and they don't do it all that often, then they should take more time and make sure that they're clear.

Pupil 12

Not only do teachers have a responsibility to make sure that pupils understand what they are saying, they should also be alert to the fact that what they *perceive* to be clear explanations are, because of task difficulty or unfamiliarity with topics or concepts, nevertheless confusing for pupils. The responsibility to anticipate the possible difficulties that learners might encounter – conceptual, semantic etc. – and scaffold pupil learning appropriately is captured in the following quotation in which the pupil reveals an insight into the difficulties that teachers face:

Sometimes in my cello lessons Mr P, who is very good at playing the cello, he is a very good cellist, but sometimes it's hard if he says, "I want you to play an F sharp on the A string which is up there", and it's hard but because he knows how to do it, he can't explain, "This is how you find it", in simple terms, and I once tried my hand at it. There is this one at primary, this woman used to be my teacher and she said, "Would you go and help Tom do this for Christmas?" I was trying to explain to him how to do a note and we did it for about half an hour and he couldn't do it and I couldn't explain it. I assumed that he would just be able to pick it up because I knew it.

Pupil 12

Drawing on his own prior experiences of being in the role of the teacher as well as the learner, this pupil recognises the difficulties inherent in attributing both his own failure, and his pupil's failure, to play the note accurately to any lack of ability in listening; instead, he is aware of the possibility that in either – or both – case(s) it could be the result of poor explanations or the learners' lack of conceptual understanding or relevant experience. Such awareness of himself in both the role of learner or teacher, and of the different demands made on each in respect of their listening, appears remarkable for a twelve year old.

While the majority of participants recognised and accepted the teacher's authority within transactions, this was not always the case, and at times pupils discussed – and in the observations demonstrated – their willingness to resist the teacher's improving role. Pupil 22, when exploring this idea, comments:

I think it can be quite different because you think the teachers are trying to improve what you do, but sometimes you think that you're more right so you don't tend to listen [to the teacher] as well as you do to other people.

Pupil 22

This observation resonates with the teachers' accounts of their concerns that, on occasion, they may try to exert too much authority over transactions with pupils. The teachers concluded that care should be taken when authority is exercised. The pupils acknowledged that, at times, they had the confidence to decide that their own opinions and those of their peers were more acceptable than those of the teachers.

### **Listening and social identity in classrooms**

Participants thus believed that both teachers and pupils had rights and responsibilities within classroom transactions, and that one of the main determinants of the success of their listening was the quality of such

interactions. A number of pupils drew attention to the social identities which they had established in classrooms, and to the ways in which such identities could lead them to follow a different agenda than that established by the teacher. Pupil 3 describes one teacher's efforts to engage the whole class in a discussion and comments on the pupils' difficulties in contributing. He notes, however, that the '*private* conversation' which occurs in a smaller group – and from which both the teacher and other pupils in the class are excluded – is preferable and is more likely to prove successful:

In the class discussion – sometimes we just repeat things and she tries to get people to say things but sometimes they won't say anything different. But in the groups we can have a bit more – kind of private conversation and we can all say what we think. It's just easier, and we get a better chance to say what we think, even when it's different from the rest. 'Cause we're not really going to say something different when everyone is agreeing in the class are we? But we know the group better, and we have a spokesperson who reports back so we can say what we think but we don't have to say it in front of everyone do we? The reporter says, "Someone in our group thought" – something and he won't use your name so it's better – easier to say something.

Pupil 3

Identification with, and inclusion in, such a group allows pupils to feel comfortable and confident enough to contribute an opposing point of view which would not be possible in whole class discussions. Their anonymity is preserved during the reporting back session and the potential for any loss of 'face' is thus averted.

Several pupils also indicated that they preferred discussing in smaller friendship groups, not only because they could readily identify with them both personally and socially, but because they shared a common discourse for such interactions. The quotation from Pupil 21's interview resonates with the account of social literacies in Chapter 3 as she explains how a common, shared discourse within her group enables and facilitates her listening:

They speak to me – the way they say things is the way I say things so they're easier to understand – they use the same words as me. And – and they know how I'm feeling, don't they, 'cause they know me better. Well – I mean the teacher knows me but not in the same way, so it's easier with my friends. The words – the language they use is the same as me so it's easier. Like in some subjects the teachers use language that I don't really know and I find it hard to listen 'cause I don't know what they're talking about. And also – my friends know what's going on in my life and they know when I'm depressed or something and they know how to handle me then.

Pupil 21

This pupil's identity within the classroom is inextricably linked to the social context of the group in which she has a personal knowledge of the other participants; shared past experiences; and a shared language for interactions. She feels excluded in some curricular areas because teachers employ discourses within which she cannot operate. The language used by her friends, however, includes her within the social transaction.

Many pupils commented on the beneficial effects on their listening of being in groups in which they could simply relax and be themselves. Knowing group members well, being able to anticipate possible reactions, and being comfortable in a group had a considerable impact on their feelings of confidence in their ability to contribute appropriately. Pupil 27 discussed the feelings of security she experienced when friends were in close proximity during interactions:

'Cause she's like – just sitting next to me. And I know her. We know each other and I don't have to – I can be myself 'cause she knows what's happening and she feels that same about things as me – as I do.

Pupil 27

## **Controlling listening: knowledge, norms and practices**

In this section of the chapter an analysis is offered of the pupils' representations of their purposes in, knowledge about, and monitoring of their listening actions. Where appropriate, insights gained from the observational studies will be used to clarify and delineate what emerged as a complex set of practices.

A detailed account has been given in the previous chapter of the many ways in which the teachers sought to encourage and develop pupils' metacognitive awareness and control of their listening. Teacher scaffolding of pupils' listening before, during and after tasks demonstrated explicitly to pupils how metacognitive behaviours could be integral at each stage of a listening activity. The quality of the tasks themselves; familiarising pupils with the genre features of different texts; cueing pupils into their listening; providing different purposes and contexts for listening; and teacher modelling of effective metacognitive behaviours and strategies revealed clearly to pupils the practices that teachers wanted them to pursue. All of this, however, would be of no consequence if there were no clear demonstration of the pupils themselves being aware of, and following, these metacognitive practices.

Analysis of the interviews and observations revealed that these pupils were behaving metacognitively in two quite distinct senses of how they monitored and regulated their listening. Their accounts of how they monitored their understanding, and of how they exercised conscious control over their listening when understanding broke down, resonate with traditional representations of individual 'executive control'. Their reports, however, of how they regulated and controlled their listening depending on the context for listening, their purposes for listening, and of the cultural tools which made it possible to frame that control highlighted the inadequacy of earlier representations which do not take account of these interpersonal and ideational aspects of listening.

In the sections which follow an analysis will be given of the different ways in which the pupils had indeed assimilated many of the messages being communicated by their teachers. The focus will initially be on the ways in which pupils monitored their understanding and the strategies they used when difficulties occurred with their listening. Attention will then shift to the ideational and interpersonal aspects associated with the regulation of listening. When discussing these interpersonal aspects, what will become clear from the quotations themselves is the close interrelationship between the social norms of group interactions (explored in some detail in the previous section) and the specific intellectual practices employed when monitoring and controlling listening within such transactions.

### *Regulating listening: individual monitoring and control*

The pupils described the many ways in which they attempted to monitor and control their listening and the strategies they used when understanding faltered or, in some instances, broke down. Most articulated this in terms of increased attentiveness; they attempted to ensure that they increased their efforts to focus, to sustain attention and to block out distractions. Pupil 3 describes her increased awareness of, and alertness, to, her own cognitive activity as she attempts to make sense of a text during a listening task:

I try to pay attention. Concentrate. Not let myself get distracted – try to understand what I’m listening to – I try to – when I think, ‘What on earth is all this about?’ I try to make – sense of it in my own mind. Sometimes I think I don’t know about something but I really do know a bit, I’ve heard a bit about something before so I just try to – think about it – or keep reminding myself what I’m listening for but saying it over and over in my head – so, ‘What are the clues that he – Henry V – is feeling angry?’ That sort of stuff.

Pupil 3

This participant, in her efforts to understand, structures her listening by drawing on relevant past knowledge; engaging in active rehearsal; and by



increasing concentration. On the theme of conscious, active rehearsal, Pupil 12 constructs a metaphor (significantly from the language associated with computers) to describe how he tries to ensure that information, once understood, will remain in his long-term memory:

But just by going over it in your head – and make sure you don't just think about it once. Sometimes people just put something in their head and hope that they will remember it. If you go over it in your mind a few times then you know that it's in there, it's saved on the hard disk and not on this loop that goes round and gets wiped every hour.

Pupil 12

Metaphors associated with computers and the processing of information appeared in more than one account. Pupil 33's version bears striking similarities to that of Pupil 12, though they were from different schools:

Well, you switch on your brain and you listen. When the teacher says something your brain can get all the information and take it in. And it will go out and store itself at the back or the place that it's been stored. So, if you miss something you can go back there for it.

Pupil 33

Effective storage of information, according to this view, allows the listener to access missed details or misunderstood information from the memory. In a similar but slightly different vein Pupil 21 describes how she monitors and structures her listening during an intrapersonal listening task and her own actions, both physical and mental, as she concentrates on the matter being attended to:

I concentrate hard. Set myself – you know, like this (*becomes rigid almost*) – block out everything from my head – if it's a tape I'd look down and focus on the one thing – like the table or the jotter – or I might close my eyes – concentrate – try to pay – attention to what they were saying – try to remember what I was hearing. When you're listening to a tape and you've got to answer questions, it's easier the second time 'cause you don't have to

listen to everything, only for the ones you've missed the first time. I keep in my mind what I'm listening for, you know, like 'the main reasons for the pollution' or something like that that Miss G's asked us to listen for – that's about it I think.

Pupil 21

Being aware that she has 'missed' something when listening to an audiotape does not appear to be an insurmountable difficulty for this pupil; rather, she identifies the gaps in her listening and understanding, and makes use of that information to engage in the kind of selective listening which enables her to focus only on what was missed the first time. Her purpose for listening remains firmly in mind as she engages actively with the task. The distinction between the regulation of listening during such intrapersonal activities – e.g. listening to an audiotape – and interpersonal activities was highlighted by several participants. In the former, strategies used to focus attention and regulate listening when problems arose included closing their eyes in order to sustain focused attention. Pupil 25 notes:

But when I'm listening to something on tape – I have my eyes closed. I'm trying to focus exactly on it – longer – to pay attention to what it's saying.

Pupil 25

When discussing interpersonal listening, however, the additional information gained from observing others within the interaction was perceived to be particularly helpful in the transaction in general and when difficulties were experienced in particular. The different ways in which pupils regulated their listening within interpersonal contexts will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Despite their best efforts to regulate their listening and focus attention, many of the pupils acknowledged that because of both external and internal factors such regulation might prove difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Though they discussed several strategies for blocking out external interruptions and

distractions, several concluded that certain internal distractions were, on occasion, simply impossible to overcome:

If you have a problem at home, or whatever – then sometimes no matter how hard you listen you can never actually listen. ‘Cause your focus has gone.

Pupil 33

An explicit knowledge of the affective dimension, and its possible effects on both listening and the regulation of listening, emerges clearly from the preceding quotation.

### *Regulating listening: ideational aspects*

In Chapter 5 a detailed account has been given of the different ways in which teachers scaffolded pupils’ listening by making them aware of the underlying structures of the texts they would encounter in listening tasks, and of the very specific genre markers of the different forms. Great care was also taken by those teachers to ensure that pupils understood that many texts did not fit neatly into one single genre or another; rather, several genres could be blended together, apparently seamlessly, into a text and the challenge for the listener was to remain alert, not only to the distinctive features of the different texts, but to the purposes of both the text itself and to their own purposes for listening. Before embarking on activities, pupils were alerted to these distinctive features, ‘cued in’, and their listening was thus scaffolded and supported throughout.

To engage in the kind of listening in which the regulation and control of that listening is shaped by the *structural and linguistic features of texts*, is to engage in metacognitive behaviours which are fundamentally different to those described in the preceding section. In more traditional accounts of metacognitive monitoring and control, the focus has been on the individual’s ability to monitor his or her understanding and draw on cognitive tools from his or her repertoire to repair understanding when meaning broke down. The emphasis, therefore,

was on the individual's own internal existing cognitive resources. Within these classrooms, however, teachers had provided pupils with a whole other set of cognitive resources from which they could draw as they regulated, monitored and controlled their listening. In other words, they acquired a set of cultural tools which enabled them to frame and regulate their listening. This is not simply a matter of helpful framing of different kinds of texts; by being alert to and following the conventions and expectations of different genres, listeners were engaging in a *qualitatively different kind of listening experience*.

The pupils' accounts of how their teachers scaffolded their listening highlighted the extent to which they were aware of the genre features and how their listening was framed by such awareness. The extracts from their interviews, reported on in the first part of this current section, reveal how their listening behaviours were regulated, and understanding was monitored, by such knowledge. Close examination of these earlier quotations reveals pupils' perceptions of the ways in which they framed, regulated and monitored their listening by using their knowledge of the different genres of texts. In the following section the interpersonal aspects associated with the regulation of pupils' listening will be discussed.

### *Regulating listening: interpersonal aspects*

When analysing many of the pupils' accounts in which they described both their own listening and the listening behaviours of others in group interactions, the conclusion that they were fully aware of the norms of such interactions is unavoidable. In the following extract – which is representative of the majority of responses – the pupil reveals the extent to which she is 'buying in' to these norms:

She wanted us to understand why we were listening. She also wanted to teach us that by listening we can learn a lot of things and by responding to what people ask you and helping people

and talking to them and listening to them and giving them respect of what they're saying and not saying, "Well, that's wrong", because that's not what my idea is. You should think, 'Well, this is a good idea as well. It may not be my idea but it's someone else's opinion on what it is. That's their idea or opinion, it's not mine.'

Pupil 7

This pupil clearly views listening from a transactional perspective. He is alert to the *demands of the context* in which this interaction occurred and to the different ways in which the views of others can be listened to, respected, yet challenged. He clearly recognises the purpose for listening which had been established by the teacher for the listening task. This awareness of context, and of the interactional norms which determine behaviour and shape such transactions, is also captured in the following extract. Pupil 26, in discussing a group activity, readily communicates his understanding of the teacher's purposes in setting up the discussion; of his own role and responsibilities in the group endeavour; and of the demands made on him to monitor both the interaction and his own understanding within it. Engaging in such self-regulation allows him to determine when it is appropriate to make his own contribution in response to what he is hearing, and to ensure that his contribution is pertinent:

In the first one you were listening to what the person was saying and picking out details and facts and information and the second one you were discussing, you had to listen and sort of think about it at the same time because you needed to say something when your turn came and you had to be thinking about what had already been said and you needed to listen so you could say something in return.

Pupil 26

Pupil 26 goes on to discuss the importance of regulating listening in order to be appropriately attentive to others in the group and ensuring that the ideas of others are reported accurately:

You've got to have a quite good memory with listening in the groups so you can remember what every person has said and

you've got to try to get it right – there's this guy in our group and he says, "And Chris said –" and I didn't say that at all, he got it wrong so that's important with listening 'cause it's a bit annoying.

Pupil 26

In a similar but slightly different vein, Pupil 12 has clearly internalised the expectation that in group interactions he is owed certain rights to have his ideas treated seriously. This participant also perceives the process of listening to be embedded within a transaction in which he expects group members to adhere to the norms of group interactions:

The group. I definitely prefer that. I like to listen and sort out then what I think about something. Sometimes it helps me to sort out what I'm thinking if I haven't made up my mind yet about something. I like to say what I think as well and try to get over my point of view to the others. I try to treat it seriously so that they treat what I say seriously as well.

Pupil 12

The preceding paragraphs have highlighted some of the ways in which many pupils articulated their ideas about how they regulated their listening to act in a socially acceptable manner and respect the ideas of others. During the observations such behaviours were witnessed as pupils engaged in collaborative group discussion tasks. Several participants, however, developed their ideas further and suggested that although it was entirely appropriate to behave in the ways described above this was simply not enough; rather, they believed that within such contexts a particular kind of listening effort is required which involves active engagement with, and analysis of, others' ideas. Pupil 21 on this theme comments:

Sometimes I'm not too sure about something and it helps me to listen to other people's ideas and opinions so I can sort it out for myself. I mean, I don't just listen to their ideas and think to myself, 'Right, that's the answer', but I think to myself, 'Right, she thinks this and she thinks that so are they right or not or partly



right and partly wrong and what do I think, what's my opinion?'  
With [listening to] the tape, you're on your own.

Pupil 21

This theme also runs through the following quotation in which the idea that in order to achieve this kind of listening the listener will often have more than a single focus for that listening is explored; in this case, the listener is listening to *evaluate* the content of the message, the speaker's intention and his or her motivation for communicating:

When you're listening to other people you're thinking about what they're saying and why they're saying it and how good an idea it is and things like that.

Pupil 7

On a different note, Pupil 12 highlights the importance to his own listening of being willing to take account of the views of others in order to widen and develop further his own understanding of the topic under discussion:

I think a group for me is easier because I'm hearing other people's opinions, so it can change my opinion of what I have just listened to because I could listen to say a party [political] broadcast for Liberal Democrats because it's coming up to an election and I hear a party broadcast. But if I do support Liberal Democrats then I hear it in a different way to somebody that doesn't. So to get the true meaning of something you really have to bring other people into a conversation, because otherwise you're just getting your own opinion, and if that's the exercise it's all very well but otherwise you're not really getting all the information that you need if you're just getting one person's point of view.

Pupil 12

What is evident from the preceding analysis is that there is a great deal of self-regulation going on here, but it is not of the kind described in the first part of this section, nor in some accounts in the literature on 'executive control'. Rather than an *individual* agent in clear control, a single executive, the picture which emerged from the pupils' interviews and from the observations was one in which there appeared to be '*competing voices*'. Such '*voices*' could be within the

individual pupil's mind as he regulates his listening to follow the norms of group discussion; to be appropriately attentive; and to listen to, and engage actively with, the ideas of others. The 'voices' could also be located within a functioning group. Within such an interpretation, the metaphor of the single executive appears limited and less than helpful. The following quotation makes the point succinctly as the pupil describes how she regulates her listening in order to be able to make an appropriate response:

You were discussing, you had to listen and sort of think about it at the same time because you needed to say something when your turn came and you had to be thinking about what has already been said and you needed to listen so you could say something in return.

Pupil 26

The pupil's transactional perspective on listening emerges as she describes the 'competing voices' in the interaction: she was listening, interpreting; evaluating; linking current interpretations to earlier ones; remaining alert in anticipation of her turn to speak; and simultaneously thinking about what would comprise an appropriate response. The extract from Pupil 22's interview neatly draws together the ideas discussed from the earlier quotations:

If it's in the group I keep looking at the person who's speaking and think about it so I have something to say back to them at the end when it's finished. I don't interrupt them. And I sometimes ask questions or say, "Is what you mean?" to make sure I've got it right. I know I can be a bit bossy in groups so I try not to be and try to give everyone a chance to have their say. I don't let my mind wander away to other things 'cause it's hard if you've missed something and then someone says, "Jane, what do you think?" and you don't know what to say because you haven't been paying attention to what the other person has said.

Pupil 22

This pupil is clearly aware of the social demands of the transaction and of the need to ensure that she demonstrates, and is seen to demonstrate, appropriate listening behaviour. There is also a desire to ensure that she does not 'lose face'

within the interaction as a result of lack of attention and a subsequent inability to respond.

The preceding paragraphs have demonstrated that not only should any discussion of the regulation of listening take full account of the *ideational* aspects discussed earlier, but that pupils also regulate their listening in different ways depending on the demands of *interpersonal* contexts. The kind of control described within the sections on ideational and interpersonal regulation, however, do not sit readily within current descriptions of individual metacognitive control; and the analysis of the transcripts and data from the observational studies reveals the extent to which the boundary between what is internal and what is external has become somewhat blurred. In light of this, it seems reasonable to suggest that the accounts of metacognitive control which appear in the literature are limited, and that a need now exists for such accounts to be expanded. This task will be taken ahead in Chapter 7.

## Summary

This chapter began by offering an analysis of the different ways in which pupils talked about and specifically represented listening in different contexts. What has emerged clearly is that while some pupils could – and did – use language and concepts associated with individual cognitive processing, many moved more naturally towards discussing their listening in terms of how listening behaviours are informed and shaped by different genres of texts and communicative purposes. Genre, and its influence on their listening practices, has therefore been revealed as a central theme in these pupils' accounts. Significantly, when discussing the ways in which teachers supported and scaffolded their listening, pupils described approaches which provided them with a specific set of cultural and social tools. Such tools enable them not only to engage in listening which is qualitatively different to that described in the

literature on individual processing, but they also make it possible for pupils to monitor and control their listening, within different contexts, in ways which move beyond current representations of metacognition and 'executive control'. The limitations of traditional accounts of scaffolding and of metacognition, and the crucial influence of social context, have thus also emerged as key themes.

It has been noted in earlier chapters that much of the previous research into listening has tended to focus on individual cognitive and affective processing of messages, and that listening within the social and cultural contexts of classrooms has received little attention. We now have a fuller understanding of certain of the cognitive processes involved in listening, but the ways in which different genres of texts, tasks, purposes for listening and contexts impact on listening performance have not been explored in any depth. In Chapter 3 an account was offered of how research in related domains has expanded and of the ways in which genre, literary and communication theories have been extended to take account of sociocultural perspectives. Parallel developments in literacy research reflect similar shifts. Research into listening, however, has not benefitted from the insights that would result from sociocultural investigations. In this study, therefore, it was important to acknowledge this gap in the literature and, when investigating listening, to move the focus away from the individual and delineate the nature of the 'listening work' that was required of pupils.

The decision to focus on *listening practices* in classrooms, and the methodology adopted to achieve this, has meant that a substantial body of complex data has been generated from the observational studies and the teacher and pupil interviews. Consequently, the analysis of the data, presented in Chapters 5 and 6, has generated a significant number of themes. It is not the intention within this current chapter to take each theme in turn and offer a detailed examination and discussion; to do so would serve only to obfuscate the central messages which emerged clearly from the data. Rather, the discussion will focus on the key themes identified from the teachers' and pupils' interviews. In the interest of clarity of exposition and coherence each theme will be discussed in turn, but their interconnectedness will be highlighted as appropriate in an attempt to



ensure that the sheer complexity of the data remains firmly in mind. Where appropriate, comparisons with and contrast to previous research, and between teacher and pupil accounts, will be made. Accordingly, the chapter will be organised in the following way.

It will begin by reiterating the limitations of the study and the need to avoid the dangers of generalising to the wider population of teachers, pupils and schools. The focus will then shift to *genre*, one of the central themes which emerged from the study, and to the move from viewing listening as a generic phenomenon towards acknowledging that listeners shape and form *how* they listen depending on the specific genre of the text. Viewed in this way, listening within a particular genre is a qualitatively different experience. Participants' accounts of:

- how they listen differently depending on the genre of the text;
- the demands on listening that different genres pose; and
- the ways in which different communicative purposes impact on listening ability

will be discussed. The theme of *genre* will also feature in the sections which follow – albeit less prominently – in which *genre and scaffolding of listening* and *genre and metacognition* are examined.

The key themes which emerged under the broad heading of *listening within the social contexts of classrooms* will then be explored, the interconnectedness of these themes discussed, and the implications for pedagogical practice considered. The focus here will initially be on the participants' perceptions of the *norms of appropriate interaction* within small group and whole class contexts, and the extent to which group members adhered to these norms. The ensuing influence on participants' listening behaviours will then be explored. Attention will then shift to *listening within social relationships*, and the ways in which social transactions shape listening behaviour and the quality of such listening will be examined. *Teachers' and pupils' responsibilities* will then be considered and the social identities of listeners within classroom transactions will be discussed.



The focus will then turn to *genre and scaffolding of listening* and central themes which emerged concerning the nature and quality of teacher scaffolding of pupils' listening, and pupils' scaffolding of their own and each others' listening, will be explored. The crucial importance of genre will be examined, and how developing listeners' awareness of the deeper underlying structures of texts will offer them tools to support and scaffold their own listening. The limitations of current conceptualisations of scaffolding will be highlighted, and more helpful, expanded ways of discussing scaffolding will be proposed.

In the final section, *metacognition*, key themes with regard to the range of metacognitive listening behaviours highlighted by participants will be identified, and implications for practice explored in a discussion which calls for a 'problematising' of metacognition and for an expansion of current conceptualisations. Within this discussion matters such as the move from *individual regulation of listening* towards a focus on the *ideational and interpersonal aspects of regulating listening* will be explored. The chapter will conclude by offering suggestions, in light of the findings of the present study, about possible directions for future research.

### **Limitations of the study and issues concerning generalisation of findings**

The Methodology Chapter (Chapter 4) contained a detailed account of the research procedures used and a full justification for methodological decisions. In Chapters 5 and 6, which reported on the findings of the study, every effort was made to ensure that the data gathered were made as visible as possible and that a clear picture therefore emerged, not only of the findings, but also of how they were gathered, analysed and interpreted. In this sense, my approach throughout was to keep Mishler's (1990) advice concerning the visibility of the

data firmly in mind. The strengths and limitations of the approaches adopted therefore emerge readily when reading the thesis.

Although the sampling methods have been described and justified, and the advantages and disadvantages in choosing ten 'expert' teachers have been acknowledged, it nevertheless seems to me that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. While it must be acknowledged that a randomly drawn sample may have resulted in more variation in terms of the quality of their thinking and teaching, my overriding concern was to avoid adopting a deficit model when discussing and analysing the teaching practices observed. I was much more interested in investigating what teachers *could do* than in spending time focusing on what they *couldn't do*. I also recognised that these teachers shared similar positive attitudes to learning, teaching and to their own professional development as practitioners.

However, the limitations of the teacher sampling strategy must be restated. From such a sample of teachers it is not possible to generalise from the findings of the present study into the wider community of teachers of English; nor could it be claimed that these teachers necessarily represented the views, knowledge, understanding and concerns of less skilled teachers. It is not possible to assume that all teachers of English would demonstrate the same levels of confidence in their teaching, and in their discussions of that teaching during an interview. The gender imbalance of the teacher sample, noted earlier, should also be considered.

Turning now to the pupil sample, similar cautions need to be expressed concerning the generalisability from the sample to the whole population of S1 and S2 pupils in English classrooms in Scotland. These pupils had clearly benefitted from the high quality of teaching that had occurred, both prior to my observations and interviews and during them; the data themselves are

testimony to that. It cannot be assumed, however, that similar findings would emerge in other classrooms with other pupils.

A further area that needs to be considered is the particular context within which the research occurred. The teachers involved in the study worked in very different types of schools in and around the Edinburgh area. While it has emerged clearly from this thesis that there were many positive processes and outcomes with regard to the teaching of listening happening within and across these schools, there is a need to be tentative about generalising from the findings to the wider population of schools. Further investigations would be required in schools and classrooms in which there was a more varied conceptualisation of listening than that which emerged from the present study.

Having acknowledged the limitations of the study, however, it is important to note that irrespective of the particular school context, and of teacher and pupil sampling methods, a significant amount has nevertheless been achieved with regard to our understanding of the demands made on listening by different texts, tasks, contexts and communicative purposes. It was the presence of this good teaching that has allowed me to gain the insights that will be discussed in the following sections where key findings, and the implications of these findings not only for current conceptualisations of scaffolding and of metacognition but also for future classroom practices, will be explored.

### **Genre and listening**

The observation studies and the teacher interviews demonstrated the extent to which teachers believed that different genres of texts, and differing sets of communicative purposes, impacted on pupils' listening activities, and they noted that some genres posed much greater listening demands than others. Most teachers suggested that ready familiarity with genres that had a strong

narrative form strongly assisted their own listening. Some also made statements that can be read as indicating that narratives could exert a strong 'pull' on listening – that listeners become engaged within a narrative, whereas other forms required a more detached, observing stance on the part of the listener. Teachers argued that the listener quickly 'tuned into' the familiar patterns and structures of 'traditional' narratives, but they suggested that some forms – particularly non-fiction – could be quite demanding because of difficulties which arise when the route through them is not well 'signposted'.

When discussing their own listening practices, the teachers were able to discuss the ways in which they adjusted their listening depending on the genre of the text, and how they used their knowledge of the specific markers and structures of forms to support listening. They did not, however, think that pupils would draw readily on either their implicit or explicit knowledge of texts to support their own listening. In addition, in response to questions concerning the genres of texts to which pupils would find it easiest to listen, most teachers responded that stories with strong narratives would pose least difficulties.

Significantly, many pupils did indeed recognise that their listening behaviour altered depending on the genre of the text and, although a few were unable to use the metalanguage associated with genre markers and struggled to find an appropriate language with which to articulate their ideas, many drew fairly confidently on an appropriate discourse. Many pupils, but by no means all, indicated that they found imaginative fiction easier to listen to; some, however, noted that non-fiction proved less difficult because of the recognisable structures which were imposed on many forms of non-fiction writing.

Irrespective of which form of texts teachers and pupils found it easiest to listen to, what is of crucial importance here is the fact that neither group viewed listening simply as a generic activity within which they listened in the same way, regardless of the genre of the text. Rather, both teachers and pupils were

alert to the fact that their own listening behaviour within an activity was in some important way shaped and formed by the nature of the text to which they were listening. They were aware that the experience of listening, therefore, was different when they knew that it occurred within a particular genre. During the observations one teacher was observed listening to, and discussing, love poetry with her second year class (*Burns – My Love is Like a Red Red Rose; Shakespeare – Let Me Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day*) because it was close to St. Valentine’s Day (14<sup>th</sup> February). She had been working on non-fiction earlier in the week. When asked about his listening during these lessons, and whether he believed that he listened in the same way or differently depending on the text, one pupil responded eloquently that while he:

Couldn’t know exactly what would come or how it would come with the poems, it’s about feelings, and you know, it’s usually a bit over the top. So, romantic images – lots of looking into each other’s eyes – red roses – might rhyme – figures of speech and...

... but with the non-fiction you know to change your listening ‘cause it’s the facts and the paragraphs and the – and your listening’s sort of structured.

Pupil 39

This pupil’s response demonstrates that not only is he aware that he listens differently depending on the genre of the text, but that he has both explicit and implicit expectations when he approaches a particular listening activity.

These findings have important implications for the ways in which listening is taught in schools. It has been noted that research into the teaching of reading and writing has long recognised that awareness of specific genre markers, and of the underlying structures of texts, will support pupils’ reading and writing. Similar findings have emerged from the present study with regard to genre awareness and listening, yet there exists little in the published research which focuses on this area in any depth. In the section *genre and scaffolding* which follows, a picture emerges clearly in which the teaching of specific genre



features of texts is central to teachers' success when scaffolding pupils' listening; awareness of genre features is also crucial when pupils are framing their own and each other's listening activity. In *genre and metacognition*, the penultimate section of the chapter, familiarity with the markers of the different forms is seen to be crucial, not only to individual monitoring and control of listening but also to our awareness of how monitoring and control are enabled by an increased understanding of the ideational and interpersonal aspects of language.

There is a need now to consider how the relationship between genre and listening can be made explicit to all teachers of English during staff development sessions, since the skills observed in the pupils' listening throughout this study, and their ability to discuss their listening practices, were impressive. The pedagogical practices witnessed – which are discussed in Chapter 5 where a full account of *genre and teacher scaffolding* and *genre and metacognition* is offered – were often of the highest standard. The quality of pupil learning which resulted is evident in the accounts given in Chapter 6. While it was certainly the case that these teachers had made a real effort to produce listening lessons of the highest possible quality, it could in no way be argued that the pupils' understandings were simply the result of this short series of lessons. Rather, these pupils had benefitted from the ongoing high standard of teaching and learning which had clearly taken place – and continued to take place – within these classrooms.

### **Listening purposes**

In Chapter 5 it was noted that the teachers experienced considerable difficulties when attempting to discuss cognitive activity with regard to the listening purpose(s) established for tasks, though the central importance of the purpose(s) for listening was identified by both teacher and pupil participants. The majority of participants recognised that they listened in different ways depending on



their purpose(s) for listening, but they could not explain what these differences were.

This need not be construed and discussed in terms of a teacher deficit model. The findings of this study have revealed that the relationship between cognitive activity and purposes is considerably more complex than has previously been recognised. Despite several searches of the literature, no relevant research into cognitive activity and listening purposes has been found. It may be the case that it is not possible to discuss listening purposes in terms of individual cognitive processing, and that a more helpful approach would be to consider the different ways in which purposes are tailored and differentiated to meet the needs and demands of texts and contexts.

This is an important point; if purposes for listening are inextricably tied up with texts, and the role of the teacher is to somehow get pupils to 'buy into' the different ways of interpreting different genres depending on both the texts' purposes and pupils' purposes for listening, then teachers will require tools to help them take this ahead. The implication here is that a different discourse is needed to that which is used for discussing individual cognitive processing. If purposes and contexts are similarly interlinked, then an even more complex picture emerges. Should further research confirm that this is the case, then this would have important implications for the ways in which language is taught and how it is described and analysed in government curricular documents.

### **Listening within the social contexts of classrooms**

It was noted in Chapters 5 and 6 that although the teachers and pupils were able to draw on the language and discourses of cognitive psychology when asked specific questions about individual processing when listening, most recognised that listening involves more than the cognitive analysis of a particular message,

and moved naturally towards a discussion of the sociocultural demands associated with listening in classroom contexts. We listen to 'read' a person as well as a text, and to understand a social transaction and its demands. Listening behaviour was therefore seen as being centrally concerned with developing particular ways of being with and responding to others.

The teachers' accounts revealed that they viewed listening very much in normative terms, and that they expected pupils to adopt an appropriate way of interacting with their peers. However, they recognised the difficulties that pupils could face in adopting and sustaining such behaviour, and several suggested that although adults could choose to make an effort to listen, despite an intrinsic lack of motivation or interest, pupils would find it difficult, if not impossible, to do so if they were unable to identify with the group and its purposes. Pupils' lack of awareness of the rules of such transactions, and their unwillingness to challenge one another, were identified as reasons for the failure to listen. Teachers' responsibilities in assuming more authority and demanding certain kinds of behaviour were also discussed. Teachers concluded that a considerable shift in how they perceived themselves and their roles in group transactions would be required if more successful and positive interactions are to be achieved by their pupils.

The teachers' talk about the norms of listening that pupils were expected to follow is consonant with the perspective on learning provided by Shotter (1993) who moves away from a view which presents learning simply as a process of acquisition and focuses attention on the gaining and performance of a set of cultural practices and on ways of being with others:

Thus our task in learning how to act personally, as an autonomous member of our culture, is in learning how to do all the things in our culture, like measuring, inferring, remembering, perceiving, listening, speaking, etc., we must learn how to do them as the others around us do them – we must learn to be as they are. Indeed, if we

do not, then they will sanction us and not accord us the right to act freely.

(Shotter, 1993:70. cited in Anderson and Sangster, 2004)

Analysis of the pupils' transcripts, however, demonstrated that despite their teachers' conclusions, many were indeed well aware of the norms of group interactions within classrooms and of their responsibilities in 'buying into' them. Several reasons were offered for the difficulties that some pupils experienced in adhering to norms, and a significant minority of pupils noted that they had simply chosen to reject them.

While all ten teacher participants were well aware that listening was firmly embedded in social relationships, and that the nature and quality of such relationships were significant factors in determining the quality of listening, it was interesting to note that few of the group activities observed were organised on the basis of friendship. Almost all pupil participants, when discussing their social identities in classrooms, indicated the powerful influence that interacting with friends in small group interactions had on both the quality and the quantity of their contribution. Many articulated this in terms of feeling comfortable with friends who knew them; of being relaxed in a non-threatening environment; and of having a shared history of past experiences. Some moved beyond this, and discussed the familiar shared discourses which existed in friendship groupings and the beneficial effects this had on their listening. When discussing instances where they believed they had listened particularly well, almost all pupils referred to the kind of therapeutic listening which characterises interactions with close friends.

Although this is not a new insight, it is certainly significant, and has implications for the future pedagogical practices associated with listening. The increase which results from friendship groupings in pupil self-confidence, trust, and in simply feeling free to engage in transactions where their opinions are afforded due respect and attention should not be underestimated. The

previous section has demonstrated that teachers underestimated both pupils' awareness of the norms of interactions and of their responsibilities to 'buy into' them. For a number of complex reasons some pupils are deliberately choosing to reject them. It seems reasonable to suggest that one such reason may be the fact that these adolescents (who are highly sensitive and alert to any implied or overt criticism) are choosing to opt out rather than to risk engaging in transactions where they could potentially 'lose face' in front of their peers. The desire to 'save face', as we have seen, is powerful.

The teachers who engaged in this study were able to create very supportive conditions for the development of listening but they readily acknowledged that some of their efforts met with resistance rather than ready compliance as pupils pursued their 'own agendas'. Teachers recognised that pupils had rights – to interesting and motivating tasks; to clear, unambiguous messages; and to a significant amount of effort on the part of teachers. They were also aware that pupils had responsibilities, particularly with regard to adopting an appropriately attentive mindset during transactions. Such responsibilities were expressed in terms of the social and moral obligations associated with the quality and nature of pupil effort, and their willingness to assume more responsibility. Teachers, however, were aware of the imbalance of power within classrooms, and of the dangers of abusing their authority by pushing pupils to accept these responsibilities. It is interesting to note, therefore, that several pupils were willing – and able – to resist the teachers' 'improving role'. Others suggested that teachers should be more demanding in terms of their expectations of pupils, and should not accept anything less than appropriate levels of engagement and attentiveness.

When asked to discuss what they perceived to be their teachers' responsibilities, pupils had little difficulty in responding. Most expressed the view that although they had been explicitly taught to read and write (and to a lesser extent to talk, i.e. to deliver a talk to an audience) few had previously been

*explicitly taught how to listen* and this was perceived to be a fundamental and important responsibility which teachers had failed to meet. This is a worrying finding. In the *National Guidelines: English Language 5-14*,<sup>1</sup> which inform the teaching and assessment of pupils from Primary 1 – Secondary 2 (P1-S2), each of the four modes of language (Listening, Talking, Reading, and Writing) should receive equal attention. Listening, therefore, should represent one quarter of language work throughout Primary school and in S1 and S2 and should be assessed on the basis of such work. While it may be the case that teachers were, in fact, fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to the teaching of listening, and that this had not been communicated clearly to their pupils, there are nevertheless lessons to be learned from this. If, however, further research confirms that the teaching of listening is simply not taking place in a careful and systematic manner in classrooms other than those in the current sample then more fundamental questions need to be asked. In Chapter 2 it was noted that while there had previously been a focus on reading and writing at the expense of listening and talking, research had demonstrated the central role of oracy in the development of literacy. Oracy has therefore appeared in successive government curricular documents for the past twenty years. Several teacher participants believed that teachers should not only take this responsibility far more seriously, and increase their efforts, but that *they should be seen to be doing so*.

### Genre and scaffolding of listening

Analysis of the data revealed the extent to which these teachers had made available to their pupils a set of resources with which they could frame their listening *in ways that were appropriate to the demands of schools and of classrooms*. In the interest of clarity, these were organised in the report of the findings from the teacher interviews in Chapter 5 under the headings: before task activities;

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<sup>1</sup> National Guidelines: English Language 5-14 (1991). SOEID



during task activities; after task activities; differentiation; and assisting pupils to scaffold and support each other's listening. This is not to suggest, however, that these activities took place in a straightforward, linear fashion; rather, they were blended together in a such a way as to allow pupils to move backwards and forwards, in a recursive manner, as the need arose, and depending on the demands of a particular listening task. In other words, they formed a coherent whole. For example, one pupil reported that he had encountered difficulties during a listening activity (difficulties which were observed and recorded during the observational studies) and, when pressed to describe the steps he had taken to overcome these difficulties, he drew in his response on the work that the teacher had done prior to setting the task.

These teachers had scaffolded their pupils' listening in important ways which have been less well attended to in the literature on scaffolding. Of central significance throughout the lessons observed were the different ways in which teachers represented the nature of the listening tasks. For example, *before setting the task* one teacher established what his pupils already knew about the specific features of different genres by activating their prior knowledge. He then prepared a series of carefully structured, interesting and motivating lessons, based on this diagnostic assessment, in which pupils were familiarised with the underlying structures of the different genres of texts and he taught them the specific markers of these genres. By the end of this series of lessons, the majority of the pupils possessed a metalanguage with which they could identify and discuss features of texts. In this way pupils were given a set of cultural tools with which they could frame their subsequent listening tasks. By familiarising pupils with underlying structures and genre markers, and then carefully cueing them in to the listening activities, this teacher was scaffolding his pupils' listening in ways which are not taken account of in the majority of current accounts of scaffolding. In addition, he scaffolded their listening *during* tasks by differentiating appropriately and taking careful account of the range of ability within his class. Finally, attention was given to ensuring that pupils

possessed an appropriate language for reflection and evaluation and he actively encouraged the transfer of skills. Different levels of achievement were valued and differentiation also occurred at the assessment stages, where criteria for success were devised for different levels of achievement.

Teachers thus scaffolded their pupils' learning in the traditional sense of supporting them during an activity. By scaffolding their understanding of *how* to listen appropriately within different genres of texts, and providing them with the tools to frame their listening and the metalanguage with which to discuss such framing, these teachers were offering their pupils not only support with the listening tasks but a set of tools that reshaped the nature of the listening activity.

It is interesting to note that the teachers did not view scaffolding as solely their responsibility. They modelled different ways that pupils could support each other's listening and they were successful in creating supportive environments within which pupils felt confident in assuming this role. Because of this, the group and paired work observed in many lessons was qualitatively different in nature and content from that observed in other classrooms.

It has been noted in Chapter 3, where traditional accounts of scaffolding are discussed, that scaffolding has previously been viewed as occurring when pupils *are engaged on a task* (Bruner, 1986). What has been clearly demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs is the extent to which these teachers engaged in pedagogical practices which moved significantly beyond earlier conceptualisations of scaffolding. Of the ten teachers observed and interviewed, nine were engaging in similarly wide-ranging and carefully differentiated approaches. Each of the ten teachers, with different degrees of success, also modelled for their pupils appropriate listening behaviours when listening to different types of texts. During the teacher modelling stages, most teachers articulated their thought processes, which gave pupils access not only to *how*

they were listening, but also to what they did when meaning broke down or they became confused. This final observation will be explored in a later section where metacognition and conscious control of listening are discussed.

In light of these findings it is reasonable to conclude that there exists a convincing argument for extending current conceptualisations of scaffolding. Such an argument would be further strengthened were it found to be the case that there had been a sharing of perspective between teachers and pupils. When analysing the pupils' accounts, and observing their classroom activities, a key question that emerged, therefore, was the extent to which there had been a sharing of perspective. Did these teachers and pupils construe the nature of listening in the same way? It has been noted in Chapter 6, where the findings from the pupil interviews and the observations are reported, that these teachers had succeeded in realising their aims. A significant majority of pupils were clearly well aware of the fact that different texts made different levels of demands on their listening; that they adjusted their listening depending on the genre of the text; and that purpose and context for listening both had a significant impact on the nature and quality of their listening.

### **Pupils' scaffolding of their own and each other's listening**

In addition, analysis of the pupils' interviews demonstrated that an awareness of the underlying structures of texts, and the genre markers of the different forms, helped them to scaffold their own listening in a variety of ways. Most had confident control of an appropriate metalanguage with which they could discuss the features of different genres, and most recognised that they could make effective use of such knowledge as teachers cued them into listening activities. As a result of this they were also able to discuss how they framed their listening, depending on the genre of texts and the tasks set. Many teacher and pupil participants noted that the 'narrative pull' of imaginative texts, and

long familiarity with the forms and structures within imaginative fiction, helped them to frame their listening; most indicated that familiarity with the underlying structures of texts, whether fictional or non-fiction, was a key determining factor to the success of listening tasks.

The findings relating to the 'narrative pull' of imaginative texts and of familiarity with the underlying structures of a wide range of genres are of particular interest when the conclusions of several of the genre theorists (cited in Cairney, 1995) are considered. It was noted in Chapter 3 that these theorists argued, when discussing the teaching of reading and writing, that 'whole language' teachers had failed to give sufficient attention to specific knowledge about language and as a result of this they had disempowered their pupils. They concluded that:

- genres ought to be consciously chosen by writers and their writing made to conform to the particular genre's structure
- structures of genres ought to be taught to pupils so that they will model their writing on the genre structure
- there is too much emphasis on the narrative form in primary schools which is poor preparation for working in the expository modes required by secondary schools and in the outside world
- teachers have a responsibility to make the language features explicit to their students.

Interestingly, neither the teacher nor the pupil participants proposed that all texts should conform to a particular predetermined structure. Rather, the teachers suggested that what was of crucial importance was that pupils were made aware of the whole range of possible structures, and of the specific language features associated with each; such knowledge, they believed, would alert them to instances when genres were blurred (either deliberately or in error) and when listening behaviours would need to be adapted accordingly. Pupils recognised that, at times, genres were deliberately blurred to achieve certain



effects, and that understanding the purpose(s) of the text was important in determining why and how this had been achieved. Instances of this are discussed in the findings in Chapter 5. The conclusion in respect of a perceived overemphasis on narrative forms, at the expense of expository forms, requires further comment. At no point did teacher or pupil participants present perceived familiarity with narrative forms in negative terms; they recognised that within imaginative fiction there were, in fact, many different forms and several commented that, of *all* the possible forms, poetry proved the most challenging to listen to because of the almost infinite variety of structures that could be used.

A shared perspective between teachers and pupils, in which both construe the nature of listening in similar ways, has thus emerged clearly. In an earlier section of this chapter the limitations of the sampling methods were reiterated, and the dangers of generalising from this sample were stressed. Notwithstanding such cautions, and in light of the findings from the present study, it seems reasonable to conclude that there exists a need to expand on current conceptualisations of scaffolding. To reiterate the Goodmans' (1990:236) conclusion: 'effective teachers know how to create conditions that will cause learners to exhibit and make the most of their zones of proximal development.' By scaffolding pupil learning in ways which moved well beyond current conceptualisations of the term, these teachers demonstrated skill in helping their pupils not only to work comfortably within their zones of proximal development, but also to operate with increasing assurance and independence as they engaged in the listening activities. In order to achieve this, they created effective classroom conditions for learning; but they also alerted pupils to the genre features and underlying structures of texts, they cued pupils into listening tasks, they scaffolded and supported their listening in a variety of ways, and they provided differentiated texts and tasks for listening. By so doing, the teachers were successful in creating conditions for learning which moved well



beyond the Goodmans' original conception of 'effective teachers' and the classroom 'conditions' they create.

Turning now to metacognition, the participants' accounts of how – and whether – they demonstrated metacognitive control of their listening behaviour, will be discussed.

### **Metacognition: practice and practices**

The teachers' accounts revealed that while, on some occasions, they perceived their own listening behaviour to be automatic and unconscious, at other times they exercised deliberate and conscious control. Each teacher participant noted that an implicit awareness of the specific genre markers of texts shaped and determined *how* they listened, and that this occurred almost automatically. More deliberate, conscious control of listening occurred when meaning broke down, or when initial decisions concerning the genre of the text proved incorrect. Several teachers indicated that they were not sure whether their pupils could engage in similar ways by actively searching for genre markers when listening was not automatic and when the sense of a message was lost. In other words, they questioned pupils' ability to behave in this kind of metacognitive fashion.

There was little doubt, however, that these teachers were themselves able to engage in metacognitive behaviours; this was confirmed by the observation studies and by their explicit teaching. As has been demonstrated in the previous section, when scaffolding their pupils' learning, they taught and explicitly modelled metacognitive strategies at, and demonstrated how metacognitive behaviours could be integral to, each stage of their teaching in ways which ensured that they were *central to the whole activity*. The quality of tasks themselves; making pupils familiar with the genre markers; carefully

cueing pupils into the demands of different listening tasks; and ensuring different purposes and contexts for listening meant that pupils were encouraged throughout the activities to recognise the ways in which they could engage in such metacognitive listening behaviours.

When analysing the pupils' accounts, and observing their classroom activities, a key question that emerged, therefore, was the extent to which the pupils were able to behave metacognitively, and to discuss and demonstrate metacognitive listening behaviours. It is significant to note that the teachers underestimated not only their pupils' understanding of metacognitive behaviours and strategies, but also their ability to engage in them and then discuss and evaluate the success of such engagement. The pupils' interviews revealed their awareness of their own individual cognitive processing and the 'executive control' they exercised when meaning broke down. They increased their attentiveness; they drew on past knowledge and understanding to structure their listening activity; they actively rehearsed; and they increased their efforts in concentration. Their ability, however, to move readily beyond accounts of individual processing and explain how they monitored and controlled their listening depending on the social contexts for listening, listening purposes and the cultural tools that made it possible for them to frame their listening, demonstrates that these pupils possessed skills and understandings with regard to metacognition which highlight the inherent inadequacies of earlier representations that fail to take account of the ideational and interpersonal aspects of listening.

By teaching them about the structural, literary and linguistic features of texts the teachers had provided these pupils with a whole set of additional cognitive and cultural tools and resources from which they could draw as they engaged in listening activities. Because of this, not only could pupils continue to make use of their own individual ability to monitor and control their listening, but their metacognition and listening were also enabled by an increased understanding of ideational aspects of language. Similarly, by alerting pupils to

the demands of different contexts in regulating and controlling listening, and to the social demands of contexts, teachers ensured that pupils could also bring to the process a fuller appreciation and understanding of the interpersonal aspects of listening. To engage in the kind of listening described in this paragraph would therefore be to engage in a qualitatively different kind of listening experience.

What emerged clearly from the interviews and the observations was that there was indeed a significant amount of self-regulation going on as the pupils engaged in listening activities, but the ways in which they monitored and controlled their listening do not resonate with some accounts in the literature of 'executive control'. Rather than an *individual* agent in clear control, a single 'executive', the picture which emerged was one which appeared to be considerably more complex. In light of these findings the metaphor of the single 'executive' appears limited and less than helpful. Such a conclusion points to the need to expand on current conceptualisations of metacognition and executive control. Existing conceptualisations should be reformulated in ways which include references not only to the individual cognitive processing which occurs, but to the cultural tools upon which listeners can draw to frame their listening. Reference should also be made to the interactional norms within particular contexts which determine appropriate listening behaviour. To reconceptualise in this way would shift the focus away from the individual and encompass the social and cultural contexts of the classrooms within which listening occurs.

In discussing such a reconceptualisation a helpful way forward may be to abandon use of the term *metacognition* when discussing listening, (or 'pension it off' as Brown (1987) suggested) since it has demonstrably failed to capture the complex set of highly grounded features – discussed in detail above – which characterised the listening practices observed in these classrooms. Instead, *meta-listening*, which encompasses earlier representations of metacognition while at

the same time moving beyond them to suggest a more highly-developed concept, could more usefully be employed. There is little doubt that to equip pupils with the skills in listening which are implied by the term *meta-listening* would be to empower them in ways which move far beyond the confines of classrooms.

### **Directions for future research into listening practices in classrooms**

The preceding discussion has identified specific areas which would benefit from further research. Listening practices in classrooms, and the influences on pupils' listening of these social and cultural contexts, has previously received little attention, yet the findings from the present study have brought into sharp focus several important ways in which research could develop further our understanding of the impact of context on such practices. The current research took place in ten schools in and around the Edinburgh area and, while comparisons were certainly made between schools in the analysis stages of the project, more could be done to investigate the prevailing ethos within the schools, their English departments, and the specific classes observed. It would be also valuable to undertake such research within a much wider range of schools, within different geographical areas, and with different ages of pupils, in order to establish whether there existed any significant variations between such variables.

An additional area which would benefit from further research relates to the scaffolding of pupil learning. The teachers in the sample in the present study were chosen because of their reputation as skilled practitioners and could not be considered to be representative of the wider population. It would therefore be valuable to investigate a larger, randomly chosen sample, and explore the extent to which the findings here were replicated. The ten teachers observed and interviewed were excellent teachers and were genuinely committed to



developing their pedagogical skills to the highest possible levels. All ten had qualified within the previous six years and were therefore familiar with more recent research into pedagogy. All ten had made an effort to continue to remain aware of current thinking. Their understanding of how to move beyond theory into practice when scaffolding pupil learning was secure; their ability to use such understandings when creating very effective and supportive conditions for the development of listening was impressive. A wider, more random sample would not necessarily yield similar results. Future research could investigate both 'poor' teachers and 'good' teachers of listening, attempt to delineate the extent of these teachers' understanding of listening and the pedagogical practices which occurred in both sets of classrooms, and then explore ways in which poor teachers could be helped to 'bridge the gap'. In this way teachers could be helped to make the most of their 'zones of proximal development'. Such inservice could build on the ongoing work of those researchers who have focused on genre awareness in reading and writing, but with a shift of emphasis towards listening. In this way research would be seen to have an immediate and measurable impact on teacher development and practice.

An argument for further research arises from the discussion of metacognition and its relationship to learning. Previous research has recognised that learners who are aware of their own cognitive processes, and can monitor and control them, are more successful. The present study has argued that while individual monitoring and control during listening remains important, the picture is considerably more complex than has previously been realised. Future research could investigate further the extent to which the interpersonal and ideational aspects of listening impact on pupils' ability to behave metacognitively. The effect that teacher modelling of appropriate metacognitive behaviours has on pupils' metacognitive awareness in listening, and their ability to behave metacognitively, deserve equal attention. Building on pupils' understanding of the underlying structures of texts and their specific genre features provides them with some of the specific cultural tools they require to frame their



listening. Providing models of appropriate interpersonal transactions, and a metalanguage with which pupils can discuss such interactions, will offer further valuable tools. The extent to which the wider population of teachers is aware of these tools, of how to teach them, and of how effectively to model appropriate metacognitive listening behaviours, requires further investigation. Once again, the implications for practice of such research would be significant.

Turning now from suggestions for future research which arise from the findings of the analysis of the interviews, there are several important points to be made with regard to the data gathered from the observational studies which formed part of the wider research. It was noted earlier that detailed lesson plans were provided, that the observed classes were tape-recorded and that a running record was kept throughout each of the lessons. These tapes have been transcribed and initial readings of the transcripts reveal several areas worthy of future investigation. For example, no attempt was made to influence the teachers' choice of pupils to be observed and interviewed, and as a result there were more girls than boys involved. It was noted in Chapter 4 that the intention within the present study was not to focus on gender differences and there was therefore no fine-grained analysis of such matters. However, I recognised in general terms the need to be alert to any possible differences, and within this particular set of classrooms taught by these teachers there were no striking differences. Nevertheless, there exists a substantial literature on gender and literacy development and for many reasons, and at different stages in their education, boys do not seem to progress as well girls. It would be interesting to explore whether similar findings emerged with regard to boys and their development in listening, since there appeared to be no appreciable difference in terms of boys' and girls' contributions to, and achievements in, the listening lessons observed.

The preceding paragraphs have highlighted several important areas which could be the focus of further research into listening practices, and all merit

further exploration. Turning now to my own study, future work will be informed by the central insights that have emerged from the analysis of the data and which have been discussed earlier in this chapter. Such insights include the need to expand on and develop further current representations of the nature scaffolding since they do not take account of the teaching practices observed and subsequently explored during the interviews. Nor do they reflect the pupils' ability to scaffold their own and each other's listening, or the ways in which this is achieved. The importance of genre, both to listening in general and to scaffolding in particular, is a key finding which warrants further investigation. The need to problematise the concept of metacognition and highlight the limitations of the term, and the proposal that the wider term meta-listening should be coined to capture the findings of this research with regard to metacognition and listening, merit further research.

It is also recognised that there may be value in returning to the observational data at some future date to determine if it will yield further insights into the ways in which these teachers were able to create encouraging and supportive learning environments within which pupils were engaged, confident and motivated. While the lessons themselves were of a very high standard, it would be worthwhile to analyse the discourses employed by these teachers which resulted in successful teaching and learning. In particular, the ways in which they scaffolded listening and modelled metacognitive thinking and behaviours deserve particular attention. It was noted in the analysis of the teacher interviews that although the observations revealed that they possessed implicit understandings there were occasions when they struggled to make such understandings explicit, yet their teaching practices allowed pupils to acquire the skills and understanding they wished to convey. How this was achieved is certainly of interest and worthy of further investigation. If the central aim of educational research is to inform and encourage effective classroom practice, then this may indeed be a useful and profitable way forward.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Main themes emerging from teacher interviews**

1. Active listening
2. Appropriate performance
3. Central insights
4. Focus/flexibility
5. Framing
6. Purposes
7. Rhetoric
8. Sense/meaning
9. Wider contexts
10. Internal
11. General scaffolding
12. Genre: framing listening
13. Genre: automatic/deliberate
14. Genre: classroom experiences
15. Genre: cueing genre conventions
16. Genre: difficulties
17. Genre: highlighting differences
18. Genre: metalanguage
19. Genre: narrative pull
20. Genre: scaffolding
21. Genre: setting up tasks
22. Genre: assorted insights
23. Group ethos/climate
24. Group: face/face concerns
25. Group: non-verbal communication
26. Group: norms
27. Group: participation framework
28. Group: responsibilities
29. Listening/watching
30. Metacognition
31. Metacognition: reconstructive listening/memory

### **Main themes emerging from pupil interviews**

1. Central insights
2. Attentiveness
3. Authority
4. Definitions of good listener
5. Identity
6. Imagery
7. Intention
8. Interpretation/understanding

9. Listening performance
10. Listening/watching
11. Memory
12. Metacognitive knowledge
13. Responsive/interactive
14. Representations of listening
15. Group: face concerns
16. Group: norms
17. Group: other
18. Group: obligations
19. Group: responsive/interactive
20. Group: signs of listening
21. Group: social obligation
22. Group: exploratory
23. Focus/concentration
24. General scaffolding
25. Genre: classroom experiences
26. Genre: narrative pull
27. Genre: listening to deeper structure
28. Genre: teacher scaffolding/pupil scaffolding